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NOTES

MICHAEL BRODSKY's novel, *Detours*, will be published in the fall by Urizen Books, and his essay on Italo Svevo will appear in the *Journal of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry* around the same time. . . . A teacher of English and American literature, **MANFRED PUETZ** lives in Cologne. He is currently at work on a book on the American novel of the sixties as well as a new German translation of Emerson's essays. . . . **DEBORAH EVANS** is a former fashion model in England. She studies art and design at Maidstone College of Art. . . . **ALAN FUCHS** studied English at Cambridge, and is the author of *Before Starting*, published by Softly Loudly Books. . . . **ANTHONY HOWELL** is co-editor of *Wallpaper* magazine and a founder of Theatre of Mistakes art company. Among his books of poetry is *Inside the Castle*. . . . **ILIASSA SEQUIN** was born in Greece and is married to an English painter. . . . **LEE HARWOOD** has worked as stonemason, bus conductor, librarian, and forester, and is presently employed by the British Postal Service. His most recent collection of poems is *HMS Little Fox*. . . . Editor of *Vanessa*, a poetry magazine, **JOHN WELCH** teaches French. His publications include *Six of Five*, a book of sonnets. . . . A graduate of Cambridge and a Mellon Fellow at Yale, **PETER ACKROYD** is Literary Editor of *The Spectator*. He recently published a book of essays, *Notes for a New Culture*, and is the author of a volume of poetry, *London Lickpenny*. . . . **FIONA TEMPLETON** is a member of the Theatre of Mistakes Art Company. She has published in several poetry magazines. . . . **MAX BYRD**'s latest book, *Images of London in the Eighteenth Century*, will be published next spring by Yale University Press, and his paperback thriller, *Act of Betrayal*, published by Ballantine, will appear in January. . . . **ALAN HELMS** teaches at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, and has just completed a study of the line in contemporary American poetry. . . . **EDITH KURZWEIL** teaches sociology at Montclair State college and is now writing on French social thought. . . . A book on women and fiction by **RACHEL BROWNSTEIN** will be published by Harper & Row. . . . *Treble Poets I* is the name of **STEPHEN MILLER**'s collection of poems. His essays have appeared in a number of magazines, and he works for the National Endowment for the Humanities. . . . **ROBERT TOWERS** teaches English at Queens College. He lived in India for two years and has written two books about that country. . . . **C. DAVID HEYMANN** is the author of *Ezra Pound: The Last Rower*, published last year by Viking. He has a book coming out next year from Scribner's on the lives and times of James Russell, Amy, and Robert Lowell.

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NEW YORK AND THE NATIONAL CULTURE

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: This evening is the first of a series of dicussions of subjects of intellectual and public interest. These evenings have been made possible by a grant from the New York Council for the Humanities, of which Ron Florence is the director.

Last weekend I attended a conference on the future of the New York intellectual community, and the general feeling was that the future of the New York intellectual community was in the past. The subject for this evening is the relation of New York intellectual life to the national culture, and I do not think the gloom is going to be dispelled tonight. Nor is the gloom lessened when we consider that the fate of the city itself is uncertain. As you know, the relation of the culture of Paris to the rest of the country, or that of London to England, would be considered an absurd question. And the reason for that is obvious. The intellectual elite of France and England reside mostly in Paris and in London. But, in Europe, the question of where people live is thought of as accidental, at most as a geographical question, not an intellectual question. The reason why the question can be asked here, and why it seemingly has some pertinence, has a lot to do with the nature of this country, with its history and with the development of American culture, which involves a hostility towards the centers, towards the cities, and mostly towards New York. It is a hostility and a suspicion that to some extent goes both ways. And in recent years the antagonism between New York and the rest of the country seems to have been heightened for a number of reasons. I think two of the main reasons are the diffusion of the national culture by the mass media, and the general dispersal of intellectuals and writers throughout the country, a kind of brain drain of New York by the universities throughout the country.

Furthermore, the idea of a single or central tradition has been eroded, and in keeping with the new pluralism I expect that our three speakers, Irving Howe, Hilton Kramer, and Morris Dickstein will have quite different approaches to the subject.

EDITORS' NOTE: The evening on New York and the National Culture was held on December 13, 1976 at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York.

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Irving Howe

Nineteenth-century American culture, making of its distance from Europe a claim to a special destiny, was obsessed with the search for its essential character. In Emerson it found the voice that would bring to high articulateness its romanticist moralism, its detheologized religiosity, its transformation of democratic politics into a quasi-sacred creed, and its inner struggles between overreaching individualism and an ethic of mutuality.

But self-exploration has a way of slipping into self-admiration. The provincialism of nineteenth-century American culture—its illusion of self-sufficiency, a leap beyond Europe and out of history—became a badge of pride. This provincialism broke down in the post-Civil War years, a notable sign being Whitman's "Democratic Vistas," where the poet struggles to discover the reasons for his growing discomfort with Emersonian America.

From that point onward, American culture moves toward a reunification, by no means frictionless, with classical and modern European culture: e.g., Henry James's long odyssey to Europe, William Dean Howells's championing of Tolstoy and Ibsen, Van Wyck Brooks's effort to make a "usable [American] past" out of cosmopolitan values and revisions, and the turn of our major writers and artists after World War I to the insurgent modernism of Paris and Berlin.

If we now see the rise of the New York writers in the thirties not as an accidental event but as part of a continuous development within American culture, we may avoid parochial tiresomeness. That the appearance of the New York writers must also be regarded as a consequence of the mass migration of east European Jews to America and the subsequent improvization of a Yiddishist culture in the major American cities—this, I think, reinforces the point. For the penetration of large numbers of immigrants into our cities during the years between 1880 and

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1930 is a major factor in shattering the utopian fantasy of an American cultural autarchy.

What we are talking about is the steady Europeanization of American culture, occurring simultaneously with the emergence of America as a world power. That may help explain the seeming oddity that an important agency for bringing to America the great nineteenth-century Russian writers, like Tolstoy, Turgenev and Chekhov, was the parochial Yiddish intelligentsia of the immigrant quarters. Or the linked oddity that among the first major disciples of modernism in American painting were figures like Walkowitz and Weber, who only a few years before their pilgrimages to Paris had been mere novices on the East Side studying with worthy minor American artists like Robert Henri. "The introduction of modern art into this country," remarks Meyer Schapiro, "has depended largely on the foreign-born or their immediate descendants. Its point of entry was the port of New York."

If we now ask, what did the New York writers contribute to American culture, one preliminary answer is: they contributed Europe, they helped bring back the old world to a country that in part had fled from it. The New York writers were neither the first nor the last to do this, but the theme of return figured significantly in their work—in the dissemination of Russian moods and styles, the explication and advocacy of modernist masters like Kafka, the popularization of Marxist ideas, the insistence that in our time literature can only be international. If all this seems utterly familiar today, forty years ago it was not.

To help make European culture, both that of nineteenth-century realism and that of twentieth-century modernism, available to America was part of the New York writers' conscious intent. It gave them a feeling of pride, a sense of role in the midst of deracination. They saw themselves as part of an international community of intellectuals rising above the narrowness and meanness of national boundaries.

Far more ambiguous, however, was their relation to the immigrant Yiddish culture from which many had recently emerged. Denial and suppression, embarrassment and shame—these terms would not be too harsh to describe their experience.

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And harsher terms might have to be used, I suspect, if we were to consider why the New York writers, or at least a good many of them, were so sluggish in responding to the news of the Holocaust. Nevertheless, it would be a fascinating exercise to go through the first twenty years of *Partisan Review* to see how frequently Jewish references, motifs, inside jokes, and even explicit themes break past the surface of cultural cosmopolitanism and Marxist internationalism. Perhaps the New York writers might see some multiple ironies in the story about Franz Kafka's one-sentence speech to a sophisticated Prague audience that had come to view a Yiddish theatrical group: "Ladies and gentlemen, you all know more Yiddish than you think you do."

These things are hard to measure objectively. Still, do we not all feel in our bones that for good and/or bad something of the moral fervor, the polemical fury, the passion for idea and ideology that prevailed among the New York writers had its roots in secular and no doubt pre-secular Jewish life? Writing about such popular entertainers as Al Jolson and Fannie Brice in the 1920s, Gilbert Seldes remarked on their "daemonic" abandon. They were "possessed," he said. They had "a fine carelessness about our superstitions of politeness and gentility..." Anyone old enough to remember the disdain and, still more, the anxious fear that *Partisan Review* inspired in the American academy during the 1930s and 1940s, will recognize that what Seldes said about Jolson and Brice would hold as well for Rahv and Goodman, Rosenberg and Abel, Hook, and Macdonald.

Style and personal tremors apart, the rise of the New York writers had another important consequence for American culture. For the first time there was now a self-confident group of intellectuals in this country that did not derive from native Christian sources and, what is more, did not seem to feel this as an insuperable disadvantage. For the first time a whole range of non-Christian sources, references, terms reached at least some American intellectuals—terms like Hasidism, place names like Chelm, proper names like Sholom Aleichem. Little wonder that remaining portions of the native intellectual elite, or rag-tail poseurs trying to shimmy their way into elite status, found the

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ascendency of the New York writers distressing and soon were hinting darkly—how else could they hint?—that American purities were being contaminated by alien intrusions. (And let us be honest: a little anti-Semitism, genteel but persistent, was visible here. When I tell my students that only forty years ago people like Lionel Trilling had difficulty in getting jobs as professors because they were Jewish and therefore judged by fuddleheaded academics to be inaccessible to "the Anglo-Saxon spirit" of English literature, those students look at me with disbelief. Their disbelief was made possible by an earlier generation's discomfort.)

The Europeanization or internationalization of American culture had, in fact, begun decades before the New York writers appeared on the scene; but the New York writers gave it a decisive push and a distinct accent. They introduced a new voice into American intellectual and literary life: a roughening of tone and language, a burst of demotic and plebeian speech. Here, perhaps, they had a certain kinship with American writers like Whitman and Melville who had also brought plebeian strains into American writing; but because of their general uneasiness with the American cultural tradition it took the New York writers a little time to discover this. The gentility against which novelists like Dreiser had rebelled was quite beyond the reach or even interest of the New York writers as they clawed their way out of the immigrant streets. Gentility seemed comic, a gentile fraud or delusion. The immigrant Jewish writers brought inherited vulgarities, both bracing and damaging, to American literature; brought a keen, undeluded street realism, a wariness before the traps of the world.

I think the New York writers can be regarded as the first intelligentsia in American cultural history—which is a shade or two different from a gathering of intellectuals. The writers grouped around Emerson in Concord formed a group of intellectuals, but not an intelligentsia, if by the latter we mean a circle of writers who think of themselves as deeply cut off from the society in which they live while nevertheless tied to it by bonds of criticism, a circle of writers drawn from or desiring to attach itself to plebeian segments of society and thereby tending

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to see culture and politics as all but inseparable. If America ever again has this sort of intelligentsia, it will probably come from the blacks.

Influenced by figures as diverse as Eliot, Trotsky and Wilson, the New York writers gained a collective definition through the idea of an alliance between culture and politics: the defense of the modernist avant garde and the advocacy of anti-Stalinist radicalism. For a moment it came to seem as if the life of the mind—assertive, speculative, freewheeling—could be envisaged as a " permanent revolution," a ceaseless dynamic of motion and change, and infatuation with the new and untried, allowing neither rest nor retreat. Today we can see the flaws in this vision, but this is hardly the first time that a cultural misunderstanding has been productive. Modernism was not going forward along a necessary line of progress: it was quite prepared, at least in relation to politics, for a backward reactionary spiral. The state of crisis that had provided the matrix for modernism might persist toward the very end of the twentieth century, but this did not guarantee that modernism would be able to respond to, or even represent, that crisis with undiminished strength. Nor could one have foreseen forty years ago the public "success" of modernism, with the philistines and publicity people stripping it of every external trait. Whatever has remained of authentic modernism, say, the work of Beckett, came to seem like a Wandering Jew of cultural life: weary, exhausted from its own restlessness, yet unable to die.

As for the politics of the anti-Stalinist left, that too was not the beginning of a new upsurge. It had done a work of enormous moral value in undertaking the critique of Stalinism at a time when a good number of conventional radicals and liberals were blind or obtuse or stained with bad faith. But in itself, it had no resources for growth. It came at the end of a Marxist line, hoping at best that it might serve as a bridge to an unforeseen future. And the union between cultural modernism and independent radicalism, as we now can see, was neither a proper marriage nor a secure liaison: it was a meeting between parties hurrying in opposite directions, brief, hectic, a little messy.

The New York writers were latecomers. Latecomers to

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modernism, which had a brilliant initial flare in America during the twenties; latecomers to Marxism, which they experienced in a time of disintegration and shame; latecomers to immigrant Jewish life, which by now had just enough vitality left to propel them into the gentile world. And with the indigenous strands of American culture they were also uneasy: with the Emersonian tradition of the romantic sublime, with the popular colloquialism of Twain, with the moral stances of native intellectuals like Brooks and Bourne. For a few years the New York writers established a fruitful relationship with the New Critics and some of the poets grouped around them. At first this was a tie of opposition, and then, an opposition modulated into mutual influence and even friendship. It seems significant that the New Critics were also a provincial group, drawn from a part of the country that also felt neglected, and committed to a view of both society and culture that was at many points also in conflict with dominant American values.

The New York writers have not had a major impact on American literature. There are, to be sure, the "American Jewish writers," figures like Schwartz, Bellow, Malamud, but the life of this school, if it is one, seems likely to be short. Its main impetus, as well as its main themes and settings, comes from the immigrant Jewish experience; and that experience is now at an end. Writers like Bellow and Malamud arose, more or less independently, from the kinds of social and cultural milieu that the New York writers came from; later, to an extent they have not always cared to acknowledge, they were influenced by the distinctive *Partisan* tone, as mimicry, manifesto, and parody. Nevertheless, I think the dominant line of American fiction continues to be that of the native isolates, autodidacts, oddballs, and cranks, releasing the American genius for gloomy comedy and elegaic pastoral. Not the powerful divergence of Southern consciousness, not the outcries of black suffering and fury, not the raspy Jewish mixture of street raciness and high culture mandarin—none of these has yet shown itself to be as enduring and deep-rooted as the tradition of native isolates.

As for poetry, the New York writers seem to have had some effect on a few older poets—Lowell, Berryman, Jarrell, perhaps

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Kunitz, but it would be hard to specify its exact nature, other than a few tag lines, a reaching after urban worries, and a wising-up that didn't always end in wisdom. In poetry, too, I think the main action continues to be in the line of individualist self-scrutiny and rhapsody: the curse or blessing of Emersonianism.

In one branch of writing, however, the New York writers have had a major influence, and that is the essay. The form has flourished in America since at least the 1830s: one thinks of Emerson, Thoreau, Lowell, Chapman, Brooks, Bourne, Wilson. What the New York writers added was a sense of the essay as intellectual hand-wrestling, a display of brilliance, the very face of which spoke for its intentions. A few years ago I described this kind of essay as "writing highly self-conscious in mode, with an unashamed vibration of bravura and display. Nervous, strewn with knotty or flashy phrases, impatient with transitions, and other concessions to dullness, wilfully calling attention to itself as a form or at least an outcry, fond of rapid twists, taking pleasure in dispute, dialectic, dazzle." Such, in unbearable purity, was the New York essay. I would guess that it had a considerable influence on some later writers like James Baldwin. But, like the modernist literature that was one of its main subjects, it also suffered from the sticky embrace of journalism, so that in reading some magazines today one feels the discomfort of recognition brought on as by the distorting mirror of an amusement park.

If we look back with some objectivity at the experience of the New York writers, it becomes clear that the issue dominating their thought and feeling was Stalinism. And with good reason: this issue has dominated the political experience of our time. Most of the disputes that arose among the New York writers derived from the difficulty of understanding this new phenomenon: a totalitarian state employing the language of Marxist liberation and having its origins in what some believed was a proletarian revolution. Not only did this throw socialist thought into deep crisis, it presented the most severe moral and analytical difficulties for every variety of serious political thought. Having come together, in part, through a repudiation of the ghastly

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notion that the Stalinist regime represented "socialism," the New York writers found themselves developing divergent attitudes toward, as these reflected divergent theories about, Stalinism. Was Stalinism still, as Trotsky said, a "degenerated workers state," or as Isaac Deutscher modified this view, a form of despotism that nevertheless performed the "progressive" function of modernizing a backward society? Was it, as others came to believe, a new form of class oppression, variously called bureaucratic collectivism or state capitalism? Was it a variant of fascism? With whom was it proper or possible to form alliances against Stalinism? What relationship, if any, was permissible between the democratic left and the Communist Parties in authoritarian right-wing societies? in democratic societies? How real was the danger of a Communist takeover in Europe during the 1950s? What attitude should be taken toward the attacks during the McCarthy years against fellow-travelers and alleged spies?

These disputes were very sharp. Intellectual alliances were broken, personal friendships ended. The debates that began in the thirties and continue to this very day concern not merely major theoretical issues, nor merely pressing strategic problems, but the very ground of political morality. I think there is honor to be salvaged in the fact that the New York writers, like the radical sects before them, struggled with these issues. There would always be American literary people who expressed disdain at these deracinated New Yorkers who had gotten so embroiled with the problem of communism that they paid insufficient attention to such native wonders as the Lewis and Clark expedition or such imported marvels as structuralism. But here, with whatever distortions of emphasis and expression, the New York writers were right: for better or worse, communism has been central to our time.

Whatever their other failings—numerous and grave enough—the New York writers played a positive role, in contrast to their more glamorous Parisian counterparts, in making anti-Stalinism a premise of political and moral value. That, later, it could be debased into a crude antiradicalism, or that it could be distorted for reactionary ends: of course! To recognize

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this was merely to register painfully the truth that Stalinism is a—perhaps the—central intellectual challenge of our time.

Finally, I suppose, what the New York writers left to or with America was a tone of voice, a sensibility of urban complication and dismay, an expert slant of irony. The positive elements of this I have mentioned, so let me add that it was not always so admirable. Perhaps it is in the nature of an intelligentsia that it must be quarrelsome, aggressive, overreaching. When one turns to the later years of the New York writers—I assume, of course, that there has been no coherent group for the last fifteen years or so—there is a certain pall of sourness and ill feeling. Perhaps this was the result of everything in their experience that made them driving and ambitious; perhaps the result of the fact that politics touched their nerves more than anything else and political people, especially ideologues, are necessarily contentious; perhaps the result of carrying over uncritically the styles of Marxist and Russian polemic. Whatever the reasons, it has to be admitted that this world was not notable for sentiments of fraternity.

Still, if nothing else, the New York writers gave the idea of the intellectual vocation a passionate vibration that has few precedents in American literary culture. I'm reminded here of a story, perhaps apocryphal, about the visit that a famous literary man, New England nativist by decision, paid to Meyer Schapiro. The visitor complained that "you New York fellows are too ratiocinative, too intellectualistic," and Meyer answered, "You know, Mr. X, when you use your mind, you don't use it up." Well, even at this late date, perhaps, we still have not used it up.

Morris Dickstein

During the fiscal crisis of 1975, when their city was hovering on the edge of bankruptcy, New Yorkers were shocked but not surprised at the ill-disguised glee their plight evoked

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across the country. A hostile chorus of jeers, from the President on down, greeted each new plea for help; hints of racism and anti-Semitism added an ugly note to the tone of self-satisfaction; New York became an object lesson in the old-fashioned American values of prudence, thrift, self-reliance. The city was castigated as an alien graft on the national polity. Now its citizens would be punished for living high on the hog—for their welfare system, for their municipal hospitals and colleges and subways, which few other cities enjoyed, and above all for their cleverness and arrogance, their lordly airs of superiority.

Hostilities between the city and the nation did not begin in 1975 and weren't confined to differences over money and social policy. In cultural matters the dominance of New York was always perceived with bitterness or envy by the few who cared about culture; indeed, New York's cultural life was salient evidence of the town's vaguely foreign character. The Broadway theaters, with their royal families of actors and their link to British stage traditions, were the presumed aristocracy of American culture, like the opera and the ballet. They were the big leagues, which made farm teams and tryout towns out of Boston, New Haven, and Philadelphia, and helped destroy their indigenous cultural life. The moguls of Hollywood, on the other hand, were the *nouveau riche* plebeians, safely common in taste, who made mass-produced artifacts out of little pieces of Broadway and spread them democratically to every corner of the country.

But culture involves more than the production and consumption of art; it also involves the production of ideas, including the critical ideas through which art is received and assimilated. The intellectual in New York who looked down on the Broadway theater as a middlebrow institution was several times estranged, first from the country at large as an egghead and a New Yorker and then from our culture as well, which failed to meet the highest—read: European—standards. Still, the Broadway theater embodied a level of taste and professionalism, a standard of performance, against which the rest of the country would grudgingly measure itself.

Understandably, the primacy of New York was always greatest in the performing arts, even after the decline of Broad-

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way and the upsurge of regional theater in the sixties. Collective activities require money, advanced training, special working conditions, and a sophisticated audience. A culture can't produce art but it can create conditions hospitable to it: it can't create a Balanchine but it can enable him to work. The pervasive philistinism of American society, which was accurately reflected in the government's neglect of the arts, insured that good training and survivable working conditions would exist only in a few cities, especially New York, and usually under the patronage of wealth. Still, Europe beckoned, even for writers.

The writer, of course, pursues a more solitary career than the performing artist, yet American writers also gravitated from the small towns to the great cities: to make temporary careers in journalism, to seek out publishers, to live among like-minded artists in communities where identity was more fluid and malleable. Writers came to New York as Balzac's Young Man from the Provinces came to Paris—to gain money, status, and fame, but also because the city was the face of the future, where the pressures of modernity, industry, technology, and communications were altering the character of American life. The career of William Dean Howells is a famous paradigm of the culture as a whole—of the last phase of the primacy of Boston, where a self-educated young man from rural Ohio could become editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*, and then of the shift to New York as a literary center, which coincided with a heightening of social consciousness in Howell's thought and writing.

Yet it took a special writer, programmatic in his realism, to try to "do" the new urban milieu. More often the writer lived off a rich fund of early experience, and, writing half in anger and half out of homesickness, endlessly recreated the world he had abandoned. (Even Faulkner went off to Europe, and only in his third novel, at the prompting of Sherwood Anderson, did he begin to write about the world he knew best.) As the Brahmin literary language of New England lost its grip, America began to produce a vigorous, colloquial, regional, but often an expatriate literature, which combined realism with satire, nostalgia, fantasy, and even exposé, yet also testified to the survival of regional mores within and beyond the new urbanization. The writer

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rarely stayed where he was, but leaving home sharpened his perspective on the world that had formed him, and it brought him in closer contact with the disruptive forces which would soon overrun the life he had known.

For many decades the culture of New England was the equivalent of a national culture. But between the 1880s, with the weakening of the genteel tradition, and World War II, which changed America more drastically than the first world war, America had no national culture: the urban literature of New York and Chicago were regional literatures which had no greater hold on the national imagination than the literature of the South, of the rural midwest, or of California. Yet a predominant theme in fiction is the passing of the traditional way of life, the transition from a premodern to a modern society. This is beautifully conveyed in the opening pages of *Sister Carrie* in 1900, as the young country mouse arrives in Chicago and, full of wonder, takes in the lights and the scale of the big city. Needless to say, the "modern" morality that eventually helps Carrie get by proved too much for contemporary readers to stomach.

Paradoxically, though the city is the engine and the locus of change, a regional writer like Faulkner has an advantage the urban writer lacks. Often the city seems out of control, the diversity too great, the life too anonymous; unless the writer deals with a small ethnic or neighborhood enclave he feels unable to master it, any more than he can master modern life in general. *Sister Carrie* makes the anonymity of city life part of its theme, but a lesser writer like Norris in *McTeague* must transpose his characters to the pure allegorical space of Death Valley to enable them to play out the morality of their fate.

The scale of Yoknapatawpha county gives Faulkner a microcosm of society as a whole. The pressures transforming America at large (and the South in particular) are played out against the background of a traditional way of life, and express themselves more minutely within an insular and self-contained world. After the war it becomes more difficult for a writer to find a part which represents the whole. O'Hara's Gibbsville is still a microcosm, but pettier and more marginal; Updike's Olinger is less a kernel of society than a remembered locale, a setting the

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writer knows because he was there, and because his boyhood remains so vivid to him. Regional life has lost its vitality and distinctiveness and has become material for nostalgia.

From this point of view the intellectual culture of New York in the thirties—the culture that gave birth to *Partisan Review*—was but one regional culture, quite marginal to the national life. New York has always been a more inviting terrain for thinkers and talkers than for artists, as intellectuals are usually more gregarious than creative writers. Though many artists were galvanized by urban life, even when they loathed it and directed their imaginations elsewhere, it was more the intellectuals who were stimulated by the talk, the pressure, the interchange that the city could supply. Artists do need connections and a market if they are to earn their bread, but intellectuals thrive in proximity to money and power, whether it sharpens their sense of purity and alienation or gives them illusions of influence beyond their social status.

Needless to say, no such influence was available to a European style intelligentsia in the thirties and forties. Their quarrels over Marxism and modernism were parochial to the society at large—even to its cultural life, whose middlebrow organs were dominated by the last vestiges of the genteel tradition. What was exciting to me as an undergraduate about the New York intellectuals was the passion for ideas, the attention to questions of morality and personal destiny, the mingling of literature, politics and social thought, the relation to modern writers and the avant-garde, in other words, the attachment to a broad tradition in the arts, not to a parochial national one. Yet these were just the preoccupations which made intellectuals useless and impractical to a bustling philistine culture. Thus the cult of alienation made a virtue of necessity, for the hostilities between the intellectual and society were decidedly mutual.

But the intellectuals of New York had one thing other regional cultures lacked, which would decisively alter their role after World War II, and especially after 1960, as American society lurched through such visible changes. The writers and intellectuals of the South were conservative and backward-looking:

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their values were bound up with a world in decline, which increasingly lost all effective meaning in the years after 1945, when the South began to join the nation and suffer the general stresses of modern society. But the particular accent of the New York intellectuals, as I have implied, was international. They were rootless cosmopolitans, children of immigrants, spawned by Jewish-atheist systems of thought like Marxism and Freudianism, which still had little meaning for most Americans, even for home-bred American socialists. Their affinities were European rather than English or American, just as the writers they nurtured, like Bellow and Malamud, had more affinity for the Russian and Central European novel than for the English. Their minority culture had a special commitment to European modernism, and to many of the moral and ideological issues that had long agitated European intellectuals. (This was heightened when many of the Europeans themselves arrived here as emigrés in the thirties and forties). They saw themselves in European terms as an intransigeant avant-garde whose cultural preferences had political significance and whose goal was to create a standard of judgment and debate rather than to affect mass taste or public action. Yet few of them were as intransigeant or adversary as they liked to suppose.

After World War II the whole culture shifted in their direction, and this created the appearance that these writers had exerted great influence. The growth of the mass media, which the intellectuals deplored, finally managed to overwhelm the stubborn regional cultures, which subsisted on primitive communications. Industrial growth depleted the farms and small towns while technology changed the lives of those who remained. Hollywood and television reached into the cities and towns alike with the mythified image of a small-town America that their very presence was helping to abolish. Robert Warshow pinpoints this myth, and one of its political meanings, as he describes the opening moments of one particularly virulent cold war movie in 1952:

> The film opens on a "typical" American town of the kind that certain Hollywood directors could probably construct with their eyes

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> shut: a still, tree-lined street, undistinguished frame houses surrounded by modest areas of grass, a few automobiles. For certain purposes it is assumed that all "real" Americans live in towns like this, and, so great is the power of myth, even the born city-dweller is likely to believe vaguely that he too lives on this shady pleasant street, or comes from it, or is going to it.
>
> ("Father and Son—and the FBI")

The film's purpose was to separate "real" Americans from secret fifth-columnists, to isolate the foreign virus of Communist treachery within the native heartland. It was an expression of the xenophobia and paranoia that touched the early fifties, when foreign ideas, when ideas in general, were held suspect. (As Warshow says of the vengeful anti-Communist father in the film, "what is being upheld is, precisely, stupidity," a "hatred and contempt for the mind," which Warshow as an anti-Communist himself finds particularly appalling.) But cold war ideology was only a rear-guard action, the last gasp of the mythology of an unspoiled America as the real America moved forcefully onto the world stage.

If the regional cultures were partly a product of American isolation and provinciality, the direction of culture since World War II, despite the chauvinist parenthesis of the 1950s, has not been towards a national culture but towards the internationalization of culture. Godard called the discontented French youth of the sixties "the children of Marx and Coca-Cola." It was not only American industry and technology that conquered the world but also American popular culture, some of it obliquely European in origin, for it was no longer centered, as in the fifties, on insipid artifacts of canned Americana but sometimes showed a complexity and sophistication that can be traced to the influence, of all things, of European modernism. Whatever the differences of quality and scale—and those differences are great—the lyrics of the Beatles or Bob Dylan, for example, have a clear kinship with the language and vision, the obscurity, bleakness and fragmentation, of the writings of Rimbaud, Kafka, and T.S. Eliot.

The expansion of higher education, along with what

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Walter Benjamin analyzed as the techniques of "mechanical reproduction"—art books, paperbacks, long-playing records—enabled a minority culture to be diffused and cannibalized into a mass taste (which of course had other, more popular roots as well). Thus the growth of television, which they had attacked, and the growth of the academy, whose scholars had had little use for them, made possible a curious triumph for the New York intellectuals and their cosmopolitan, adversary culture, so that Lionel Trilling could describe the antics of young people in the sixties as "modernism in the streets."

I can't begin to sketch the results of this change, for it has left us with the confusions of our present cultural situation. An avant-garde culture was transformed when its modernist techniques became the staple of artists, designers, and musicians across the whole spectrum of the culture, from experimental fiction to popular lyrics to slick commercials. An adversary culture, marginal yet linked to a potent modern tradition, which depended for morale and cohesion on a monolithic philistine society, not only became fashionable but found in the politics and culture of the sixties some large-scale projections of its most privileged cultural stances. In this sense the counterculture of the sixties was the adversary culture of the intellectuals as a mass movement, with all the attenuation and impurity, the kitsch and exploitation, that such enlargement inevitably entails.

Today the new cultural forms of the sixties have themselves become attenuated or archaic, but whatever his position during that embattled time the intellectual has found no way to recover his old role. The old postures of dissidence and clerical authority have grown hollow—and who's listening?—while the new cult of celebrity can hardly prove satisfying, or conducive to the best work. Instead we seem to be living through a transitional period when culture itself, along with higher education, has been devalued, when society is still willing to pay richly for the practical applications of mind, at the same time that the spirit of self-generated play and aimless delight, so vital to the health of both intellect and the arts, seems less in demand than at any time in the past twenty years.

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Hilton Kramer

Perhaps I had better begin this evening by prefacing my remarks with a confession of uncertainty. This I know is a highly uncharacteristic thing for an intellectual to do, particularly a "New York intellectual," and especially in the presence of other intellectuals. Yet it is precisely about the existence of this class of minds—the "New York Intellectual" that forms half or more of our subject this evening—that I harbor some serious doubts. I know well enough what the term once meant. It meant the writers who contributed more or less regularly to *Partisan Review*, plus the writers who had either broken with *PR* or been banished from its pages. These were the people that Norman Podhoretz, in *Making It*, called "the family," the people that Irving Howe dealt with retrospectively—as history, and as history that had come to an end—in his well-known essay on "The New York Intellectuals." But what can the term possibly mean today? A decade has passed since Irving Howe's valedictory appraisal of this group appeared in the pages of *Commentary*—a decade that has brought the demise of several more distinguished members of "the family" without producing anyone who can seriously be regarded as their rightful heir. So what does it mean, in 1976, to continue to speak of the "New York Intellectuals" as if they constituted a significant and identifiable cultural force? I confess I don't know. So if I speak here, as I suppose I must, of the "New York Intellectuals," I use the term in quotation marks to signify the degree of doubt I harbor about a phenomenon that is now largely a pious fiction.

It is difficult to abandon this term, however, it is so beautifully imprecise, and it so conveniently masks so many unappealing, disappointing, and, as yet, unmeasured realities of our cultural life. Intellectuals are no more immune to the appeals of nostalgia than anyone else in our culture, and this is the real function that is served by the term, "New York Intellec-

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tual," today: to provide us with a false sense of tradition that might soften and otherwise render more agreeable the actual cultural tasks we perform in our society and for the description of which we seem to have no fresh language of our own. Foremost among the pleasures this term, "New York Intellectual," affords us, surely, is the illusion that those who are in charge of our cultural life still somehow function as rebels against it.

Take *Partisan Review*, for example. It was *Partisan Review*, as I have already indicated, that defined the very notion of what the "New York Intellectual" was. But *Partisan Review*, though it still speaks in the name of intellectual values, is no longer itself a New York journal, and has not been for some time. It is a Rutgers journal, a journal of academic suburbia, and the change in its status is not without significance, and certainly not without relevance to the topic of the evening. If we are going to speak about "New York Intellectuals and The National Culture" under the sponsorship of *Partisan Review*, then it is of some importance, surely, that we keep clearly in mind what the social history of *PR* itself has lately been. The best way to understand that history, I believe, is to see it as part of the larger pattern of middle-class life in this country, for the move from New York to Rutgers was exactly parallel to the exodus of the middle class from the problems of city life to the comfort and safety and dullness of the suburbs. There is this difference, however, that whereas people in the suburbs frequently complain, often bitterly, about the intellectual dullness of the situation in which they are obliged to live (and I speak here as someone who lives in such a suburb), *Partisan Review* has never, so far as I know, ever openly acknowledged a similar problem. This it has left for its readers to do.

That distinguished alumnus of New York intellectual life, Saul Bellow, has given us the only frank discussion of this situation I have seen. In the course of an interview that appeared last year in *Salmagundi*, another organ of academic suburbia, Bellow made the following observations in comparing the 1940s with the 1970s:

"There was a literary intellectual life in New York in the

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late 40s. There was *Partisan Review*, there was Columbia University, there were many independent writers, painters, and critics. The big money had not yet hit, the media had not yet developed their full power, the universities had not yet entered the picture as patrons of the arts. Between the media and the universities, the literary life of this country was annihilated. People were drawn either to *Time* magazine or to the networks" (he might, of course, have included *The New York Times*) "or to the advertising agencies on the one side, or to the universities on the other. The universities were flushed, they began to buy up the literary magazines, they destroyed anything that you might describe as an independent literary culture in this country. They didn't attempt to do so, but that was the result." We were left, Bellow goes on to say, with "no extra-institutional and independent environment for writers." This is especially true, I think, for that class of writers we think of as "intellectuals," namely the critics, who now function primarily at that nexus where the interests of the media and the interests of the academy meet.

Between the media and the universities: that might have been a useful title, or subtitle, for tonight's discussion of "New York Intellectuals and The National Culture." For it is indeed through their alliances with the media and the academy that our mythical "New York Intellectuals" exert what influence they have on the national culture. This influence is of several kinds, and not all of it is bad. In the criticism of the arts—although here, of course, I am in danger of speaking from self-interest—I think it is, by and large, an influence for the good. We are not, in my opinion, living in an age of great criticism. Most of it is pretty mediocre, some of it horrendous. But however we judge its quality and seriousness in relation to the criticism of other times, the criticism of the arts produced in New York remains, with rare exceptions, the only real criticism we have, and it performs, in some fields at least, the requisite acts of discrimination and elucidation that the rest of the country, the national culture, lives on. This criticism has its faults, of course. It persists in perpetuating the illusion that something akin to the old avant-garde still exists as a vital force in our culture. This is

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the sheerest nonsense, of course. The culture of modernism is triumphantly installed in all the institutions that preside over our cultural affairs—in the universities, in the museums, and in the mass media. It is sponsored by the Federal government through the Endowment agencies. It is sponsored by the state through the New York State Council on the Arts. Yet, like the term "New York Intellectual," the concept of the avant-garde is difficult to give up. By holding on to it, we continue to postpone the day of reckoning—the day when we must face the fact that modernism is no longer a challenge to our culture but is, indeed, the sum and substance of our culture today, and face the question of whether it is any longer adequate for the role it is asked to fill in our lives. We hold on to this concept of the avant-garde for the same reason that the commissars in the Kremlin hold on to the notion that they are "revolutionaries": it creates the illusion of flux, of historical momentum, of heading toward some ideal goal, of contending with weighty opponents, without obliging us to acknowledge that *we* are now the custodians of what this movement promised us, without obliging us to acknowledge that *we* are the establishment representing its values. There is something comical in this evasion, and something tragic too, but for the moment, at least, it aids the tasks of practical criticism in the arts, for we, as custodians and administrators of the culture of modernism for the rest of the country, are well-placed to elucidate its remaining mysteries, such as they are.

The old "New York Intellectual," as defined by the old *Partisan Review*, represented a conjunction of two primary interests—the culture of modernism, and the politics of the anti-Stalinist Left. The first of these interests is now, as I say, the common possession of our established public culture. And so the "New York Intellectual" can be said, I suppose, to have led the way to the establishment of a new mainstream for the national culture. But in the second of these interests, the politics of the anti-Stalinist Left, it lost its nerve in the 1960s, and has been in conspicuous disarray ever since. The truth is, it was only on the question of Stalinism that the "New York Intellectual," as here defined, ever showed any political wisdom whatever. About the

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politics of liberal democracy, it showed itself to be ignorant, indifferent, and snobbish—or, as they say, elitist. Go back to those early numbers of *PR* in which the issues of the Second World War are discussed, and see if you can read those pages with anything but the most acute embarrassment. A class of minds that took pride in an awareness of historical forces proved to be completely out of touch with historical reality. They themselves proved to be victims of the jargon of "revolution" and the mystifications of Marxist ideology at the very moment when their exposure of the Stalinist myth might have been expected to cleanse them of the corrupting effects of radical rhetoric and belief. But it was less the Second World War than the Cold War that brought about an abatement in this devotion to the jargon of "revolution"—a jargon, let us be reminded, that has no language but the language of contempt and enmity for the values of liberal democracy. For the "New York Intellectual," Stalin and Stalinism were the only political realities that were really felt and really understood, and to its great credit, the "New York Intellectual" firmly resisted them—until the sixties ran their course. To its great discredit, Stalin and Stalinism were the *only* political realities that were felt and understood.

That language of contempt for liberal democracy is, alas, one of the things our intellectuals have bequeathed to the national culture—it is, perhaps, our most conspicuous political gift to the nation. It was of this language, to which it added its own peculiar embellishments, of course, that the New Left made its movement—the movement that all but swamped the single, shining political virtue that the old "New York Intellectual" had to his credit: his firm opposition to Stalinism in all its implications and manifestations; the movement, let us not forget, that in 1968, in Chicago, gave us the Nixon presidency.

The political failure of our intellectuals—which is also a moral failure—has, I think, created a political gulf (I would say a healthy gulf) in the relation of intellectuals to the national culture that does not exist in quite the same way in the arts. Politically, we are not trusted—and we are not to be trusted. When was the last time our intellectuals had anything cogent to say about defense policy, or even about the need for a defense

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policy? Our intellectuals function, in this respect, the way the governments of Western Europe often function—in perfect confidence that they can say or do anything they please to malign the American defense establishment because that establishment, with its "nuclear umbrella," so much despised by intellectuals, will be there to protect them from the Stalinists who are still, yes still, our enemies in this world.

This political failure is, as I say, also a moral failure, but there are other moral failures too. What have our intellectuals to offer the national culture in the way of wisdom about marriage and the family, for example? Anything but attacks, and often vicious attacks too, on the most elementary fealties of family life? That one of our leading intellectual journals should devote space, in issue after issue, to a commercial writer proseltizing for the joys of buggery—this, I think, is the measure of the distance at which our intellectuals stand from the national culture. In politics, and in morals, we are something of a disgrace. Out there, in the national culture, we are allowing the likes of Gore Vidal and Garry Wills to represent *us* today. And do we have any values in the name of which their influence can be resisted? Perhaps that is what a discussion of "New York Intellectuals and The National Culture" should be concerned with.

* * *

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: Before we throw the discussion open to the rest of you as we had planned to do, Irving Howe wants to make a few comments.

IRVING HOWE: No. I have a joke. Hilton's called into question whether New York intellectuals exist and that reminds me of a story about Morris Raphael Cohen. A student came in to see him and was in a state of epistomological panic, doubting his personal identity and in sheer desperation he cried out to Cohen, "Can you prove to me that I

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exist?" And Cohen said, "Well, perhaps I could, but to whom should I address the proof?"

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: I should tell you that everything is being taped here this evening. This is not to warn you, this is to tell you that if you want your remarks to come out clearly, it would be better if you walk over to the side to one of the microphones.

MARSHALL BERMAN: Just a brief question, but while it's still fresh in my mind, I'd like Hilton Kramer to tell us the right values that we should embody and express to the rest of the country...at least some of them.

HILTON KRAMER: Well, I'm not sure that—I think that subject belongs to another symposium—but I would begin with some acknowledgement that the values of liberal democracy as they've been developed in this country are of the greatest priority, are of the greatest value to our lives, and that there's something sick about an intellectual class living in the freest society that history has ever known, to devote itself to the discussion of repression. I think the issue of the fealties of family life are something that might engage serious intellectuals at a time when everything in the culture, whether the mass culture or the intellectual culture (between which it is often difficult to distinguish), is nowadays designed to destroy the family.

BERMAN: Can you tell us how we should act with our families?

KRAMER: No, that I am afraid I cannot do.

PHILLIPS: I see a hand way back. Way back on the left. Could you stand up. I can't see very well. Tell us your name please.

CHARLES PRUETT: My name is Charles Pruett. I'd like to simply ask how you can discuss the national culture with a panel that doesn't concern itself with having any women on it, any black people on it, any Puerto Ricans on it, or any of the people that make up what we understand to be part of the culture in this country or anywhere in the world. It seems to me that to sit and lament that the intellectual is in a dilemma seems to be suicidal. There are a number of things going on in New York that are changing it completely and I would think you would spend some time dealing with all the currents that make a national culture and hope you would make it grow forward and make it better for all of us rather than sit and lament that we here in this room are not satisfied with our particular goal.

HOWE: I think that's a tiresome point of view. It's possible to discuss France without being a Frenchman. It's possible to discuss Russia without being a Russian. It's possible to discuss Italy without being an Italian, it's possible to discuss women without being a woman.

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It's possible to discuss men without being a man. It's possible to discuss blacks without being a black. It's possible to discuss whites without being a white. All that's required is some intelligence in the doing of it. Now whether or not any intelligence has been displayed here is for everyone to judge. But the limitations which the three speakers share, that they are all male, if limitation that be, I don't see any reason to hold that excessively against them.

PRUETT: You seem to imply an objectivity when you haven't even thought about women and children. How can you be objective about an issue when you haven't considered making a choice about it in terms of...

HOWE: By an exercise of mind.

PRUETT: What exercise of mind?

HOWE: His mind, my mind, his mind, good minds, poor minds, interesting minds, dull minds, but minds.

PRUETT: But they are assuming that you have the right to lament somehow.

HOWE: I have the right to say anything I wish, as you have the right to find it inadequate.

PRUETT: But I also have the right to disagree.

HOWE: You certainly do.

PRUETT: And I just think that any discussion of national culture in this country ought to include all of...

PHILLIPS: I'm more responsible for the make-up of the panel than are the three speakers. And the only thing I can say is, as some of you may remember in the 30s, when the Communists had a meeting—a symposium—on the platform there always had to be the following representation: there had to be a woman, there had to be a black, there had to be a Jew, there had to be a youth, but, most important, there had to be a WASP...because there was a scarcity of WASPS. And we all thought that was very funny. I think one should address oneself to what people say rather than what they are. I mean, suppose I were to say to you, "How can you judge objectively what white people are saying?" You know, you could turn it around that way. I think if you want to make any comments about the content of the talks, it seems to me that's perfectly legitimate.

MORRIS DICKSTEIN: I'd like to go back and make one or two comments on some of the things that Hilton Kramer said that puzzled me. One of them is, I was confused by how he could begin by eloquently and probably accurately denying the continued existence of the New York intellectuals as a class—or as a coherent group of people—and

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then go on to make what seemed to me a generalized indictment of the New York intellectual simply because Gore Vidal writes in praise of buggery and so on.

HOWE: The point is, if we existed, we'd be no good.

KRAMER: It's what is known as a paradox.

DICKSTEIN: Let me mention one or two other paradoxes. Sometimes I get confused by paradoxes. We have what seems to be a paradox of an argument which I agree with, which is that the culture of modernism has become an established culture—that it's been in great demand in the media or at least it's had influence on the media, it's been in demand in the universities, and what puzzles me is not so much what Hilton Kramer said. It was the tone of irony. Would it be better if all of these intellectuals had remained an alienated class? If journalism and the universities had continued to behave toward the intellectuals as they did in the 1930s and 1940s and kept them an isolated class, more or less without jobs and without any influence on the culture? It was hard for me to pinpoint the reasons for the ironic tone. Hilton Kramer did acknowledge that there has been some value in the assimilation of the intellectuals in the criticism of the arts, but aside from Irving Howe's description of some of the odder kinds of mergers of journalism and intellect, some of the kinds of caricatures we see of the New York intellectual style in the world of journalism, which I perfectly agree with, I couldn't see why this was a lamentable thing, unless it was simply to point out that the so called avant-garde or the avant-garde stance of modernism was no longer the case. Well, it's obvious that when a culture is diffused, when a culture does achieve a kind of unexpected triumph, that the concept of the avant-garde no longer has any of the same kind of significance that it had before. But I don't see why we have to cling to the concept of the avant-garde or why the concept of the avant-garde is any longer meaningful....

KRAMER: Well, could I just address myself to that, because I would like to pinpoint the exact issue that Mr. Dickstein is questioning about and it's in this sentence of my paper where I speak of the foremost pleasure of this term "New York intellectual" being the illusion that it affords those who are in charge of our cultural life to still harbor the illusion that they function as rebels against it. It is not that I necessarily wish that everyone was still alienated, although one does have a certain nostalgia for it, and certain values followed from it that are not readily accessible among the assimilated; but whether one yearns for that alienation or not, the one thing one has a right to

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ask of the class that is running things is that they don't pretend to be alienated, that they acknowledge that they are running things. And it is this divided mind...this pretense that somehow the people who, say, write in the *New York Times Book Review* are somehow writing against the grain of the culture. Well they are not. They are the grain of the culture. And for them to suppose otherwise is either hypocrisy or an epistomological crisis.

DICKSTEIN: It seems to me that the phrase "running things" is a puzzling one. It seems to me that the person who is running, say, the book review page (of the *New York Times* or the art-critical page of the *New York Times*) may also feel alienated even though he is, in a sense, running things. He's running that, but he may be alienated, for example, from other things in the drift of American society. He may be alienated from American foreign policy. He may be alienated from what the State Department has done in Chile.

KRAMER: But he shouldn't pretend to be alienated from the things he's running.

HOWE: Well, he may be running less than he thinks he's running. But why don't we be quiet for a while and let people out there talk. I see a lot of hands back there.

ROBERT LIFTON: I wanted to raise this question mostly to Irving Howe but to the others as well. Actually Irving and I have talked about it once before. I'd like to put it this way. Is it possible that the very achievement in exposing Stalinism and in taking an anti-Stalinist left position, has immobilized New York intellectuals to a considerable degree? After all, we're all creatures I think of our main survival, of our main confrontation, and we tend to see a good deal of the rest of existence through the prism of that survival or of that confrontation. And if that's so, it could be that some of the immediate threats to us and to the world may be erroneously perceived or distorted via that prism of relatively simple or absolute anti-Stalinism. The work had to be done and the problem of Stalinism is still with us. Nonetheless there may be even graver problems such as annihilation, or nuclear holocaust or various versions of genocide or mass killing—the major reference point being the European holocaust—but expressing themselves in new ways. Even the kind of point that Hilton Kramer raised about our being the freest country on earth—well, we are a rather free country and I was struck during the antiwar opposition to Vietnam—the word should be mentioned somewhere tonight, it seems to me—that we had a lot of freedoms in saying some fairly harsh things—those of us who opposed the war. Nonetheless,

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our country was capable of doing a lot of killing while granting those of us who opposed the war considerable freedom. Our opposition wasn't all that important and that may be one of the reasons it was tolerated. That is a situation in the world that has got to be looked at. It may be a new one. It's a lot easier to take a simple moral stand when something develops a fairly clear cut evil and only that, or maybe clear cut good...but when you get that combination of freedom and destructiveness, that may be a whole new situation to evaluate and analyze. That plus situations of holocaust may not reduce themselves to the central Stalinist imagery and I wonder whether one might address that as a difficulty created by an achievement.

HOWE: Mr. Lifton's question requires a fairly complicated answer. Do I think that the achievements in exposing Stalinism immobilized the intellectual? There aren't any "intellectuals" in this anymore than I think there are *the* intellectuals who are undermining the family. I mean, some of us have done a fair share of undermining the family and others have done a fair share in defending it. But I don't know that we need be terribly specific on that. But it's true that to be caught up with a major idea can cause some people, for understandable psychological and moral reasons, can be the determining fact of their life. And if you have some historical imagination of how hard it was to be an anti-Stalinist in America and indeed that the liberals whom Hilton is praising without qualification, that a great many of them were pro-Stalinist in the 30s as against the Marxists and radicals...

KRAMER: Who got praised?

HOWE: Well, you say that the left—and you're right in a way—the left has done damage or has...

KRAMER: I wasn't aware that I praised anyone!

HOWE: Well...wait a moment...I assume that if you attack a great deal, there must be the tacit possibility of praise, Hilton. Now, you attack the language of contempt for liberal democracy. Well, and I think that's a valid charge against many of the people on the left in the intellectual world; insofar as we were guilty of that, I think, fair enough. You have the right to attack us for that. But I think that it's also important to point out that the people who were supposedly the defenders of liberal values in America, a good many of them—not all by any means—a good many of them were pro-Stalinist. And if you want to point to moral confusions on the part of the Left, you have to also recognize parallel moral confusion in the liberal community.

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Now the reason I mention this is that, I think it immediately relevant to Bob Lifton's questions. To be sure, some people were immobilized by anti-Stalinism and could see no other evil, no other enemy, and that's very unfortunate, I think deeply unfortunate. I think one ought to be, in principle, as able to be charged up and made angry and indignant by what the junta in Chile does as by what the regime—I don't know—in Poland or in Cuba does. But this of course requires, first, a very considerable degree of political sophistication, the capacity for seeing two enemies at the same time and trying to make relative judgments of which at a given moment is the greater enemy—and there's no sure-fire way of doing it because you're dealing with an historically unprecedented situation in the age of totalitarianism; and it also requires considerable moral poise. Now it's easy enough to say, in retrospect, that some people veered a little bit in this direction and other people veered a little bit in that direction, in terms of imbalance. But you can't expect everyone to have been as perfectly poised as William and I always were!

LIFTON: If I could say one more thing...about being able to see two enemies instead of one. It's the more difficult (and I'm not simply casting stones on this...really difficult issue) it's the historical imagination that is in a way bound to that Stalinist experience as opposed to all kinds of new experiences. The approaches are interfered with by that binding of the intellectual imagination to the Stalinist experience.

HOWE: There is some truth, I think, to that, Bob, namely that it's very hard to be caught up by two major historical experiences. Now if you could show me a good number of examples of people who were adequately responsive to what we might call (in quotes) the "post-Stalinist" experience and who remained adequately responsive to the Stalinist one, as against those who were responsive only to the Stalinist and not to the other that came later, then I think your point would be stronger. But you see, what some of us were upset by, during the Vietnam period, was that many who were making perfectly cogent and powerful criticism of American policy in the Vietnam war were talking about North Vietnam and Cuba in the way people had been talking about Stalinist Russia in the 30s...in utterly fatuous and self-deluded and disastrous ways. Now, yes, to be sure, one should be able to see all these evils at the same time. But what I'm saying is that a number of people, to be serious, have tried. In practice it is extremely difficult. What's hard is to make the political judgments and adjustments of relationship that are

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required by people who believe in democracy and in social change: to make the political adjustments that are required in relation to these contending political forces. Where do you make an alliance here? With whom can you make an alliance there? If you are caught in between two forces which you feel are threatening your very existence...how do you parry one against the other? Now, you can take a very simple-minded stand. On the one hand, unconditional anticommunism; or you can take a very simple-minded stand on the other side, and there are plenty of people who do that, and I think they're both mistaken.

DICKSTEIN: I'd like to add a few words of comment to Bob Lifton's question. I agree with everything that Irving has said about the difficulty of keeping the kind of balance and poise; but somehow I think that making it a matter of such difficulty somewhat devalues the rather remarkable role that he and *Dissent* played, for example, in the 1950s, in a period in which an honorable anti-Stalinist model, which had served a vital and important function in the 1930s and 1940s had become, by the 1950s, an excuse for general antiradicalism; had spilled over into considerable depoliticization of intellectuals who had prided themselves on how political they were. It had created among the more extreme examples a kind of intellectual parallel to McCarthyism. The obsession with Communism in the 50s had caused intellectuals to do all sorts of things which were simply not honorable.

KRAMER: What was the intellectual equivalent of McCarthyism?

DICKSTEIN: The intellectual equivalents of McCarthyism are, for example, writers who justified the firing of teachers who were supposed to be communists, or who were communists, from schools. There were a number of intellectuals who did that...how's that for an example?

KRAMER: That would be an expression of McCarthyism if it was unfounded. It wouldn't be an intellectual equivalent of the thing, it would be the thing...if it was unjust.

DICKSTEIN: And if it was just, if they were communists? Would your values of liberal democracy say that....

KRAMER: Well, that's not the question. That's not the question. You spoke of the intellectual equivalent of McCarthyism in the 1950s that *Dissent* held the line against and I want to know what this intellectual equivalent was because I don't recall it.

HOWE: Suppose you change "equivalent" to "approaches toward."

KRAMER: Well, and where does that lead you?

HOWE: It leads to many examples which would be perfectly easy to cite.

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KRAMER: Cite them.

HOWE: It leads to Irving Kristol. It leads to Eliot Cohen and *Commentary* in the 1950s.

KRAMER: And what was that precisely?

MIDGE DECTER: Names are not examples, Irving Howe.

HOWE: All right, wait a moment, I didn't bring my file of *Commentaries* with me. I always carry it around but tonight I didn't bring it.

KRAMER: You certainly carry it into your book reviews.

HOWE: Now just a moment. Irving Kristol and other writers in *Commentary* in the 50s—and this has been documented and I've cited examples in my own writing—clearly tended not to defend McCarthyism, but to deprecate the threat of McCarthyism, to insist that the danger at that time came from the other side, from the people who were being harrassed, rightly or wrongly, by McCarthy...

KRAMER: Well, from where do you think the danger was coming in the 50s?

HOWE: I think the danger in American power, in terms of American power, came from McCarthyism. I think that in terms of the intellectual struggle in America and in the world—it came from both sides. I think the Stalinists were also a major danger in the 50s in that they were supporting totalitarian societies throughout the world. The Stalinists were not supporting totalitarianism in America because there wasn't any yet.

NORMAN PODHORETZ: Irving Kristol wrote a single article in *Commentary* in 1952, the thesis of which was that the support that McCarthy was getting—the popular support McCarthy was getting—he was getting through the unwillingness and the inability of the liberal community to face up to the seriousness of the challenge of communism. And if the liberal community according to Kristol had done so honestly and without obfuscation, McCarthy support would have been undercut. To refer to such an article, as is frequently done, as support either overt or covert for McCarthy, is itself a form of McCarthyism.

HOWE: Well, Norman, I said this, I said exactly these words in the magazine that you edit in an article that you accepted for publication.

PODHORETZ: No, you did not.

HOWE: Yes I did. I absolutely did, in my essay on the New York intellectuals I said just this.... What Irving Kristol said was the American (now I'm going to put it almost word for word) the American people know about McCarthy what they don't know

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about the liberal intellectuals, namely that he is unambiguously anticommunist.

KRAMER: Was that not true?

HOWE: No.

KRAMER: Did the American public know that the liberal intellectual was anticommunist? No, the public did not.

HOWE: It depends whom you mean by liberal intellectuals. If you meant the people writing in the *Nation* of course there was some truth to that.

PODHORETZ: Irving Kristol was talking about a specific group of intellectuals, including some writing in the *Nation*...The point is that the kind of characterization you have repeatedly made of that article in *Commentary* in 1952 is itself a species of intellectual McCarthyism. It shares the following characteristics with McCarthyism: guilt by association, vague charges unsubstantiated, retreat into large symbolic gestures in the face of challenge. These are not charges that you or anybody else has ever responsibly documented. They are false. They refuse to engage the seriousness of the issues that were raised by Kristol and others.

HOWE: Let's let it go for a while.

PHILLIPS: I wanted to ask you a question, Hilton, that puzzles me. You referred to the intellectuals as "them." There's some disassociation here that puzzles me.

KRAMER: I think at the end of my piece I said that *we* were a disgrace.

PHILLIPS: All right: *we*, okay, I missed the "we."

GEORGE STADE: I find myself a little disturbed by the idea of New York, which is never quite voiced, but somehow seems to lurk in the distance that I think perhaps is the one thing the three speakers share, and I wonder whether New York quite fits into the demonology of the nation, as has been suggested tonight. It seems to me that one of the things that happens in American culture is that it has been predominately regional so that southern culture for example traditionally defined itself not in opposition to New York alone but in opposition to all of the North and for that matter all of the West. It defined itself in opposition which is what gave it I think its distinctively tolerable voice, particularly in literature. I wonder even if the adoption of modernism or the relationship to modernism is not ultimately in America a kind of regional relationship so that the relationship, let's say, of a Robert Penn Warren for modernism is somehow different from the relationship of a Meyer Schapiro but they're both deeply affected by what we speak of as modernist thought. I just wonder...it's not a question, it's a comment, whether

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New York is not somehow for all of us almost a part of Europe as was mentioned. And a part of Europe that is used as a force almost against the cultural vitality or even lack of vitality of the rest of the nation which is itself divided into different regions and different kinds of groupings.

KRAMER: Well, I'm not sure I can address myself to everything you said or every part of the question you raised, but I would like to address myself to some part of it which might also touch on something as George states it. I don't think that New York is, certainly as far as the arts are concerned, just to limit it to that for the moment, I don't think New York has this despised status that has been suggested this evening. I travel around the country a great deal. It's true most of the people I see are either attached to museums or universities. But I find when I go to Minneapolis or Richmond, or Kansas City or wherever that there's a tremendous...still a tremendous admiration for what is going on in the arts, a tremendous attachment to it, tremendous envy, tremendous curiousity; everyone feels that the cutting edge of artistic and intellectual ideas is in New York, that New York is where you are going to be judged if you're doing anything and if you're not judged in New York then you're not going to be known as doing anything. New York is still the cosmopolitan cultural center of this country and it doesn't mean that there isn't a great deal else going on. There are museums outside of New York that have magnificent exhibitions, there are poets writing very good poetry and so on. Every one, the directors of those museums, those poets, all know that ultimately they're going to be weighed in a scale that exists in New York. And I really don't think that this country is regional in the sense you're suggesting. I think that writers, no matter how regional their materials may be, when it comes to having their art judged, the art which is their writing or painting or whatever, they know that it's going to be judged in the cosmopolitan center and that remains New York.

BERMAN: A couple of remarks, a couple of very brief remarks, and then one that will take a little longer. The first one is that it's as meaningful to say that the new Left brought us the Nixon administration as it is to say that liberalism brought us the war in Vietnam. OK, the second thing is that those who are worried that New York intellectuals are not alienated enough, or too involved in the system, let me assure you that my friends are getting fired every day, my graduate students, not to mention undergraduates have no prospect of any kind of intellectual jobs at all, so there'll be a whole...there's a whole new wave of alienated intellectuals coming soon, and if

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anyone is nostalgic, just hang on a little while. OK. Now...I want to return to the Kristol remark that was fought over earlier. I think that the key word in that Kristol sentence—and Kristol is a man who is very careful about his use of words—is "unambiguously." That is, he was not saying so much that the problem is that the intellectuals aren't anticommunist—you know, certainly many of them aren't, many of them are. But probably none of them who are, are so unambiguously, and that's what Kristol's American public is worried about, and I think it's just this sense of ambiguity that to me has always made New York intellectual life so attractive. The ambiguity, the uncertainty, the anxiety, the kind of embattled quality. I think that New York intellectuals are basically nineteenth-century Russian intellectuals, right? Now, one of the things that made Russian intellectuals attractive, although sometimes unbearable to intellectuals from other countries, was the sense that they felt that politics, art, everything that might be going on posed some immediate and desperate moral problem. And this sense of life as being desperately problematical and therefore how to live as a moral person evoked endless anguish. I think that when people from other parts of the country talk about New York intellectuals with both affection and exasperation that's one of the things that they have in mind. Now, apropos of that, I was disturbed by Hilton Kramer in that I felt he was speaking as if somehow he knew all the true ways to live and I or we or somebody out there just didn't and that was the point of my sarcastic remark...which was probably concealed in the question. I know in the 1960s and among many people in my generation there was a kind of complacency as if we knew, you know, the right life and all you squares out there, forget it. And I think that that's always been part of the avant-garde movement. But I feel in Mr. Kramer's talk a kind of opposite complacency, you know, as if *he* knew the ultimate values once and for all, and there was just no problem about them, except for this perversity and corruption of others. And that he himself didn't seem to experience any of those problems at all.

KRAMER: Well, as the last question has been addressed to me, I take the opportunity to answer it, I don't think there is anything in my paper that suggested that I had come here this evening believing that I was in posession of all the wisdom of the universe. What I was really talking about was something far more modest than that and that was just some elementary recognition of ideas that are being disseminated through intellectual journals that have the power to kill us...have the power to destroy our lives if we do not acknowledge the

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power that they can have over us and have over our children, our students, the so-called intellectual community and its offspring. It's really quite an elementary thing that I was talking about, and if one is going to suggest, which is the clear implication of the remark, that before one can raise one's voice in opposition to ideas that are clearly destructive of our lives one has to be in possession of perfect wisdom, then not only is New York intellectual life over but all intellectual life is over. So I think that your remark is purely a rhetorical one based on nothing serious.

HOWE: Well, but I think after all there is a difference between being provocative and being provoking, Hilton. You see, when you offer names like Garry Wills and Gore Vidal as examples of New York intellectual error or New York intellectual opinion...

KRAMER: That wasn't exactly what I did. I said that these were the names we were allowing to represent us out there in the national culture.

HOWE: Anybody who thinks that Garry Wills or Gore Vidal represents anything that I think, believe, or even secretly hope for is clearly mistaken....They don't represent anything that I or a good many other New York intellectuals believe. I mean, I believe in guilt by association in a certain way because my experience is this: when you have association, you have guilt. Nevertheless, I think that one shouldn't push it too hard and too far....We were talking about a certain group of people; maybe it was a mistake to talk about them. When I was asked I didn't want to come on the platform and talk about these people because I knew we'd be attacked for talking about them, not for what we said but just for talking about these people, because they wanted to talk about other things like the gurus in California, etc. But if we're going to talk about them, Gore Vidal and Garry Wills, they're in left field.

KRAMER: Well, they're on the left, surely, but whether they're in left field is debatable because the point that I was trying to establish—if I may complete the point—is that most of the best minds of the New York intellectuals are deceased. A certain kind of cultural apparatus was created by that generation, and there are certain writers who have filled those roles in the minds of the national culture out there. And if you don't recognize it, then you're closing your mind to something that's going on that's very important in this culture.

HOWE: I grant you that most of the best minds in the New York intellectuals world are deceased. But I don't know that you can hold the rest of us to blame for that or for surviving them. And wait a little longer and even that will be remedied. It's true that some very great

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minds in the intellectual world have been lost. We know that this world has disintegrated, we know that the reason people talk about it is that it no longer really exists as a world. When it was really a world people really didn't talk about it; there was no need to talk about it. But it seems to me that if you're going to talk about it, and criticize...look, you made a criticism which I felt struck home though it hurt me, you made a criticism that at a certain point there was a neglect of the values of liberal democracy by people of the Marxist tradition. Now, let's face it, that's true, and it hits me hard, but it's true. I think I was one of those who got around...who began to see the value of that point fairly early in the game among the people of that tradition, but nevertheless there's truth to that and I acknowledged that...I'm not interested just in polemics, I like polemics, but I'm not interested just in polemics, but when you bring in Gore Vidal and Garry Wills and the destruction of the family, no, that's pushing it too hard.

MICHAEL NOVAK: My first remark is that the evening was marvelous and coherent. My second remark is that it was most invigorating because instead of self-congratulations we've opened up serious criticism. Moreover, a criticism which was made international as I understand it from a garbled transcript I got today. Saul Bellow made almost the very point in Stockholm yesterday that Hilton was making, the same sort of accusation about the failure of intellectuals in the United States. Solzhenitsyn made the same point, and other figures have made the same point over the last several years. So it seems to me we are on a fairly solid ground. There's something not right in what we're doing it seems to me. I sometimes feel a sense of gloom about where all of us who live in a liberal and democratic world in which you can think freely, we number fewer than 20 percent of the human race or even have the possibility of being 10 percent of the human race and will it be less 20 years from now or 50 years from now. But it's not so much what's external I feel its what's internal, the degree of dishonesty in the situation that is practiced and that we are forced to practice everyday. The rhetorical binds in which we find ourselves in are really quite frightening. So I personally would like to thank you very much for this evening and for what I think was a very powerful warning.

PHILLIPS: I'm tempted to close on this note—there were a few people who wanted to talk but—I'm tempted to close on this happy note that we're all a happy family before we start disproving that....Thank you.

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STORIES

Michael Brodsky

THE POSTAL CLERK

But what of the woman with whom I began to live, from time to time. I remember the children who played in her garden. They less played than studied the ferment of shadow about the base of one tree. Eyes to the earth, they thought to learn all that transpired in the upper air, where the boughs thrust and the twigs eddy. But shadows omit much. But to focus on that region where tree becomes sky is painful, like having one's eyeball shaved with a razor. They would have been blinded, and so early in life. As if they weren't blinded enough by the injunctions they received in abundance. I could have talked to them, though only a postal clerk. Their fathers were executives, professionals. Professionals are true undertakers, they achieve daily, minutely, the burial of the personality, winged chimera of social workers and lady novelists. No one realizes postal clerks have time to observe the trees and sky, view them dispassionately, forgive them their trespasses on one's frame of mind, evolve theorems to tame the combat of the boughs, and lemmas for the palsy of the stems. I used words with which the children were unfamiliar. They seemed to refuse them. But as they were refusing they were listening, refusal was the most accessible stance, protecting their fascination. They refused the word, they returned it to me with a contemptuous question mark, a packet of skepticism badly wrapped, but their assimilation was far ahead of the formalities of acceptance and refusal. With such a stance they warded off their vulnerability to themselves. Their relation to the tree was altered once they knew words for its parts. Its boughs writhed a little more than they should have. First the word adhered, an impediment on the way to the buoyant bark. And then the bark became the embodiment of the word, they looked in the shiver of the bark for the word's emanation. Shining from shook foil. When I passed by they played all the more intensely. But they were waiting to be interrupted. I flattered myself that the game was a kind of invocation, if not of me then of the words that came from me. So they were on the margin of activity,

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neither anticipating nor immersed. In the game they bided their time before the craved interruption. If they merely waited I would never arrive. They were old enough to know what they wanted never arrives on time. But if they began to dread it as an interruption they would not be disappointed.

I tried to confide in the woman. I said things like, I feel less precarious delivering than sorting. Sorting I become nostalgic for the routes, I added, for effect. She told me there was a project up in the air to have the villagers come to the central office for their mail. The Central Office, shades of Citizen Kane. The plan grieved me. My woman's name was Fall, Mrs. Fall. She was moved by my grief. Rather, she moved away from its manifestations. That surprised me. For I had so perfected speaking of my woes it did not occur to me others could take them seriously, as living things, as other than pretexts for eloquence. I was at a greater distance from them than those who heard me speak of them. It frightened her, what I said about myself. I took that fright for the rejection of my advances. For I usually seduced with a dazzling recitation of my woes. I did not consider them advances until they procured or failed to procure all that advances are supposed to. Maybe my infirmity was precisely this distance from my woes, from my feelings (touché, lady novelists). But the only feeling I was sure of was ambivalence, recently raised to the status of a feeling. For the other feelings did not want themselves polluted by a half-breed. That I could founder in a sea of ambivalence and find sweet the subsequent shipwreck, that, I know, is difficult to grasp. So I spoke a lot. The only palliative for all that ambivalence was warm baths of utterance. I was accused from time to time of not distinguishing between dependent and independent clauses but for me all clauses are dependent, never mind the grammarians and their fine distinctions, they all depend on a listener, hang like spittle from the fang of his gaze. For a little time I believe what I say if the response is sufficiently warm. Then I sink back to disbelief, curse those who are taken in more than those who mock, I reject them for rejecting me not.

She wanted to leave me, she was so overwrought. But there was nowhere to go since we were in her house, her bedroom, her bed. I did not know quite what disturbed her: was it my grief at the imminent loss of my post, or was it my distance from my grief, from which I transformed it into eloquence, that deadened me to the resources useful in changing the situation, hanging the supervisor up by his balls, if he had any. You do not understand, I said. It was rare for me to deliver opinions about others. Monopolizing culpability was something else.

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But to ransom verdicts from the reserve my fear perfected over a long period of time, that was something else. Wasn't she going to reward me for breaking through that reserve, rending the postnatal amnion that goes by the name of solipsism, into a light, of sorts. But that dying light was overwhelmed by the raw light of the bulb overhead. Or rather, that dying light faded in the flush of her flaws, prey to the raw light of the bulb.

You do not understand, I repeated. The sentence had no meaning, it was the vehicle of an emotion still undefined, an alloy of sentiments. And it was less emotion than a need to call some emotion into being through the words, in her or in me, in me if in her. I went from the less useful, utterance, to the useless: I examined a birthmark on her thigh. Oh that, she murmured, anticipating my question. But I had no question. All future encounters would simply pivot around the birthmark, as in Hawthorne. But without dread and reproach. On the contrary, the birthmark was a kind of foothold on the steeps of irresolution. In the night I had to grope for it with a flashlight, in recovering the birthmark I recovered my equilibrium. The birthmark oriented me and when in her moods she had no fixed boundaries, when she seemed to dissolve into the landscape, dissolve the landscape, all paste and fuming lava, then it was to the birthmark I retreated. The birthmark oriented me with respect to the room's contents. So much for night that bore us on its back without complaint, along with other flotsam. Often in our lovemaking I feared the loss of the birthmark and the coordinate system of which it was the origin. Things were plotted in relation to the birthmark, once plotted they crouched vigilantly. I no longer had to look around. The lattice netted all stimuli, relevant or irrelevant. And to the vigilant, no stimulus is irrelevant. I even sustained my erections better. How to have and keep an erection. Though strictly speaking, they less facilitated the expression of my passion than numbed me to it. Shades of the polymorphous perverse, and at this late date. At the moment of orgasm, when all is blood and foam, I thought of a book, a manual, to aid others not so fortunate as I in finding peace through geometry, analytic, to be exact. But what if she fled. Farewell, coordinate system, farewell collapsible axes. Then I would have to translate the origin to, let us say, a mole on my chest, an ecchymosis on my left testicle, perennial low man on the scrotum pole. But in doing that I might topple the whole edifice. I was lulled by the thought. Eventually, as we grew older and wiser and feebly raucous in our wisdom, removed from love and lust, I would abandon the notion completely, but not the contemplation of the birthmark that system-

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atized it nor the fears that engendered it. I admitted her into the cave of my fears even now when she was not quite defanged. And perceiving her gaze, more potent than her bulk, they emerged shyly, like deer. She stroked them, regarded them curiously, the curious veining, or dappling, of their flanks, approaching something like bravado. They were going to turn her out of the village for consorting with me. The pillars listened, with varying degrees of impatience, to her defense. All of them stood at a little distance but invited her to sit. So that they might lord it over her, with their deliberative pacing. She ended up paying them to listen to the defense their ill-will made necessary. I tried to help, we had tete-a-tetes among the crumbs. For she found me in her bed when she arrived home. She was becoming used to paying for the silence they peddled as counsel and mine was free, therefore suspect, second-rate. And she was used to having her family about her in times of crisis. She remembered a lagoon, flakes of willow and the depths' capsized spire. They staged spectacles seasoned with indictments. No member 'scaped whipping. Strangers were now taking the place of her family, a new spectacle supplanted the old, almost invalidating it, a spectacle constructed and blown to bits with the help of strangers, the spectacle of a self seeking refuge from the gestures essential to self-defense in soft words and immobility. It revived her to feel like a victim. The words she recruited saved her from the gestures she would have made if she hadn't considered her listeners enemies. She might have grabbed their balls, fondled their tits, distracted them, *smiling the idiot smile of those whose rage, whose needs, know no* bounds. And, in a sense, the spectacle had already been secreted, long ago waiting in the blood for the plausible occasion, a ductless gland's trickle over epochs. The possibility of eviction was the occasion.

Had they found out about me, about my dumping into the canals. Had someone seen me pissing in backyards. But the director and the clerks knew nothing. Maybe it was just my living with her from time to time. My marital status eluded them, sated spouses all. For all her immobility and coy monosyllables she collaborated more with them than with me, their indictment was more real than my faith, more worthy of reverence or at least, consideration. New allegiances bloomed in her, avid of subjugation. Her family sent her a pittance. The installments mounted over the years and dwarfed her own earnings, not inconsiderable. Whenever she spent a small amount it confused her. Was she practical or prodigal. Her family liked to confuse her. Maybe the money they sent should have been hoarded toward some inevitable catastrophe such as her no longer wanting it, needing it.

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Thus, Mrs. Fall. What was the implicit message of the banknotes that came regularly from home. She could not write to them and ask. They were strangers to innuendo, so they thought. Meat and potatoes, meat and potatoes, the unspoken litany. She became despondent but she didn't stay despondent for long. A kind word from her accusers refunded all their latent good will, a kind word from a single accuser, no matter how peripheral, refunded the good will of all those who had abandoned her, though continuing to pace before her. Whereas I was resigned to my orphaned state. Oddly enough, whoever spoke the kind word was consigned to oblivion, forgotten, at the greatest possible distance no further balm could traverse, smothered by all those his kind word evoked. A single word became the world's welcome. So in some ways she differed from me, or, at least, I liked to think she was different. That way we were distinguishable, partitioned, and avoided mutual engulfment. I even held my fork a little differently, I was so afraid of being confused with her.

The crisis began about the time the lilacs molt, when the too voluble leaves (perfectly heart-shaped and churned by the wind to foam) have had enough of the mute spikes riding them. The crickets began. I wanted her to think a little more about my plight. But she had little patience for a plight whose malignancy, existence even, was uncertain. Whereas she had accusers, upon whom all her resources were focused. I could only persist in my blighted delivery of their mail in the hope that the infirmity would make itself known stand and deliver, emerge from beneath the shroud of symptoms and confront like a man the dubious daylight. I talked about all we would be leaving behind if we let the townspeople drive us away. But as usual my sentences annihilated the target of their concern, so deft were their construction, so resonant was my inflection. I had to traverse an infinite distance back to my targets, bypassing the words that obscured them, when possible. I was trying to get back to the sources of my pain at the same time I was propelled forward by the illusion of one more sentence, one more, clearing a path through all the others, scythe through shrubbery. Sometimes I produced such a sentence, or seemed to, dyke against the echo of those that came before and fermentation of those to come, against all phenomena that cry out for the poultice of sentences, against all deciduous things. Phenomena appal and they appal most when unlabelled. But perhaps they appal most when I have the sense they can be labelled. For some things I saw and heard there were no words. Sometimes I was frightened and sometimes relieved. Some would say I evaded with words, with sentences, probing to a

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stratum deeper. But they can console themselves with the thought that after a while evasion becomes a phenomenon to confront, and a phenomenon more virulent than most. I flattered myself my sentences had a multiplicity of meaning, they deviated from allegory precisely when they seemed least alert to its pitfalls. Anointed with ambiguity, no nook refractory to dazzle, like boles at sunset. But she was deaf, she did not hear the countless variations I played on the theme of tenderness. It was indictment and indictment only, indictment of her tormentors, even more unforgiveable. I did say they were sucking her dry but as she was undone by her saps there was no liability. She became very protective of them. Or perhaps only of their anonymity with regard to me. Perhaps she was protecting me from dreams of vengeance. Seeing them daily she might very well become attached to them. She gave me no warmth. She was drying up. I was vigilance unending against her attacks. No more guided tours of my caves, no more inspection of their denizens in the halflight. I pumped her for the details of those meetings. What were they saying about me.

She told me they called me a schmuck. Sometimes they fastened on putz as more expressive. She was bad at transitions. How were they able to go from schmuck to putz, what led them into more rarefied realms. I was best at describing not the state of things, I am no apologist for things as they are, but the almost imperceptible transitions from one state to another, when the sun is about to rend a pelt of clouds, for example, or is it the moon, when the bus rises to the challenge of a diminutive hummock and skirts the frontier of sentiency, when a man is on the verge of becoming a woman. She and her reports of those meetings were beginning to paralyze me. Before, when the townspeople accepted us and we basked in their warmth, I spoke, made sentences, at my leisure. There was no intention with a sentence of warding off sentences to come. Let them come as they may. And I was not in search of the sentence to bring an end to all sentences, the sentence of the future to summarize all previous sentences and all they netted and all that eluded them, all I missed while I was busy making them, lowering my head to the ground to drink in the words undisturbed rather than let things brew before my eyes. Now I craved and dreaded that final sentence, admitting of no reprieve, my only protection against it more and more sentences. Now, in my solitude, everything around me impinged and had to be done away with. Her presence no longer softened the contour of things. Where was the sentence that would exorcise away all these impingements. Sentence after sentence, one more side to the polygon forever in search of its

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sleep as a circle, a closed circle. Now I was hungry for sentences, now, when I was not a little bit paralyzed by all that was and wasn't being said about me. Or rather, I was less hungry for sentences than sentences were hungry for me, I became a culture medium, like a polluted stream. Phenomena incised me, sentences fed the fissures a little distance. Every time I opened my eyes I was incised. For who was there to tell me there was nothing to be afraid of from a gibbous moon or a too emphatic furrow in a willow's trunk or a housewife's smile worn at a rakish angle. Slowly I began to react to nothing, nothing impinged. That was as frightening as everything impinging. I was trapped with the ghosts of sentences inside me. My subject matter, my world, became her silence, her refusal to report. She varied her manner of refusal. One day a shrug, another a smile. I could not speak. I could not make sentences. Sometimes I regained my old state of excitement, when everything impinged. I was terrified enough by a squirrel, a half-empty glass, a shiver, to invent a sentence. I was relieved for a moment, immunized against all further impinging, or the need to register all further impinging. I was the surface of the water boiling when the heat is turned off at last. There was a terrible need to sequester the sentence that protected me. I had to protect it in turn, preserve it. No further sentence must dislodge it. These quick sentences cut me off from the commingling in the chaos of my depths, cut off whatever they registered, caught on the wing from that commingling, where is brewed the future sentence, the unpredictable future sentence. But I was afraid of that sentence, it might annihilate me the way a flash of lightning annihilates the firmament.

Were they luring her away from me. She said at last she could not bear to speak about what went on behind closed doors. And about what goes on between spread thighs. But I kept my suspicions to myself. She could not bear to think about the impression she was making on them. She preferred to think, as she left them every day, she made no impression at all. When she spoke to them she lost all consciousness of time and place. She was in another element. If she accepted the fact she made an impression, an inroad that they were the repository of the impression she made, then she would be incapable of separating herself from them. In their presence she was real. In the intervals between visits she merely postponed coincidence with her self. But she was changing a little. At first she soothed herself they did not exist in her absence or if they did exist they forgot about her entirely. But now she admitted things about herself more freely, without feeling embalmed in the utterance. In a part of herself she wanted to sink into the

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quicksand of what she peddled at a particular moment. To go on was unthinkable. If she said she could not speak to me then it was forbidden to speak to me until after the next meeting, where she inveigled them into giving the consent or what, by a delirious misinterpretation of signs she took away as their consent, to our resumption of relations. So virulent are words sometimes that when she confessed she had a pretext for living in the confession refusing to overleap the state that prompted it. Whatever she confessed belonged to them, implanted in their skulls. What she confessed implied, in her own mind, all she did not confess. Their states were fringed with omniscience. Now she no longer waited for their go-ahead signals. They were no longer the progenitors of her own movements, she did not sink into the quicksand of her words the way I sometimes sank my prick in the quicksand of my scrotum. Words became less incantatory for her, therefore more indicative of her interior life. Words were a means of release, relief, no longer the instruments of a thralldom. She went on and on, no longer wedded interminably to her painful admissions, no longer waiting for their metabolism in the gut of her tormentors. Of course she admitted nothing, especially since she was most ashamed of progress, growing independence of her tormentors. She had to believe in her thralldom while corroding its fibers. But I could see she spoke to them now to have done with them, to have done with the inquisition, and not to perpetuate an unhappy habit, to effect a stalemate. That one day she was incapable of speaking to me did not mean she would be, should be, incapable of speech the next day. Her gestures were freer. But I did not make the mistake of confusing her spontaneity with warmth.

My estrangement from sentences was not worth bothering about, from her point of view. What did she care if I was living in the shadow of a final sentence. Soon I was no longer even hungry for sentences, I tried to revive my hunger, now, when the highroad awaited. The price of her growing independence of her tormentors was certain eviction. The sooner the better. I was tired of the canals, the backyards, I made plans out loud. She no longer listened. My voice grew huskier, more insistent. One would say menopause, but without the telltale bristle around lips and chin. She was, in a sense, the breadwinner. Their words, their pauses, their unspoken verdicts, were our daily ration. I contented myself with her silence, it embodied, as I have said before, all phenomena. Once I accepted her silence I was capable of reacting to phenomena again. But they became impediments on the way to her silence. I made sentences for them but they did not count, no wound was sutured by them. Anticipating her daily return from the inquisi-

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tors I was overwrought. How did I know she would not return to announce her decision to stay, ally herself with them against my infirmity. I walked quickly over the stony paths to her house. Grass and twigs and sky they chiselled were impediments on the way to her silence, her one long pregnant pause, and as impediments they were transformed. They spoke, they assailed me, but in a new way, with a new message. I collaborated with them. They were fecundated with the sap of my impatience to arrive. My impatience was a symptom, in a sense. My sentences began to mean something to me again. Until the return itself, the long walk along stony paths, became the arena of my torment, and not her silence. The trees, the little kingdoms among the roots, the twigs overhead, were props on the stage of my journey. And the only way to make props palatable is to bypass them. No longer her silence, no longer the tasks for which it incapacitated me, for I could go on after she began speaking to me again only, but the long walk to that silence. That the passing minutes, hours, converged on her return gave them a momentum. But when I reached her I did not know what I was doing. I coincided with the event for which I had been waiting, coincidence abolished me.

I wanted to abolish my returns to her daily, so much did I live for them. I couldn't wait to finish delivering in order to go to her, to hear her tell me she had nothing to tell me. She was too tired, too worn out with her defense. I wanted to leave her, leave the post office, get a head start on a laborious eviction, leave that daily turmoil on stony paths. But first I had to stop everything I was doing, do nothing, for a while. I did not want to leave in the midst of activity. I would be only departing what would compel retrieval later, when retrieval would be impossible. I had to stop doing what I was doing and think about it, abolish my need to do what I was doing. But I did what I did so that I did not have to think about it: my job was the minimum of hubbub necessary to camouflage a long joyless vigil. It was only later, in the twilight of tasks, that I longed to be in the activity again. I had to stop and think now so that later there would be no nostalgia. I would guard against nostalgia in advance, desire for impossible return. I would focus on her silence, on my stony path, no primrose path of dalliance that, and the sun of my attention would shatter everything, as the noonday sun shatters into wisps of tinsel the locust twigs that fissure the sky. All I surveyed would share the fate of bare twigs at high noon. I cannot say I ever got to know her better. But I have images, though they are bleached enough to be the mere skeletons of words. Perhaps what bleached them was the hunger for the words to annul them. I gave

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myself up to what is known familiarly as introspection. I looked into myself, as the moralists say. But the stratum that solicited me with its buried wealth was itself a symptom of the infirmity I attempted to confront, a decoy.

I took to speaking to her. No matter if she did not answer. I censored minimally. I even believe she wanted me to speak so she could play at inquisitor. When the inquisitor speaks he is impervious to the stench of the inquisitory. There was something comforting about sentences at that time. When there was nothing more to think about. Sentences are walking sticks in seasons of vertigo. I was deeply affected by my unblemished spontaneity. It made me want to cry. I talked about the canals, my satchels, the supervisor, his wife, Joe, the clerks repairing to a small cafe at day's end. Before she could understand one sentence another was on its way, proleptic, to go against the grain of her worst formulations, to prevent misinterpretations. But she was being assaulted by so many sentences her only recourse was to misinterpretation. I pelleted her, the way a rodent pellets its comrades with its shit in times of fear. But I did not leave after all. Another woman entered my life. Was it Lydia or Livia. To L. I was able to express my needs, to invent them. With Mrs. Fall I was unable. To muddle through we crave contrasts. I must believe L. was different from F. Perhaps part of my success with L. was due to the fact I kept my occupation a secret. No need for outpourings and then rectifications for what wasn't heard anyway. I tried, as I had with Mrs. Fall, to monopolize all infirmities in advance. I could not allow they were not my infirmities per se but infirmities of the organism that was our relation. Relation not relationship, detestable word, chimera of the lady novelists and the professional samaritans. Decorum greeted me daily from the top of the stairs. As I ate and drank decorum plucked me, part chicken, part clavichord. Clavichord of the fields and graceless fowl, abject melange, that was me. But half-breed appealed to L. She was artistic and liked to exploit the schisms in others. She made me contend with her imperfections. She did not let me remain so blinded by my own.

She was to the manor born. There was much fog at night. There were bridges, faltering handmaidens of the fog. From my zone of shadow I migrated toward her, slowly, slowly, as if to suck her dry. But in the end it was she who marooned me, suffused me with the sap of her prowess. Suffused and marooned, I welcomed both, or so it seemed to me. I was helpless but inventive, invented new ways to be helpless. But I swerved in time from the ultimate helplessness whose ambush I

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invoked. Needs, needs, I kept saying. Perhaps she was the first to use the word. Not challengingly, not to dazzle me with her fissures, that I was to feed. I used it forever after, even when unsolicited, even when irrelevant, that is to say when I was most blind to my needs, from pride or satiety. I protected myself from her further use of the words. For it made me sad she was incomplete, lacerated by needs. And I protected myself against her use of the word as expletive for me. How could she know if I was in need, needy, if whenever she asked me I said, with a snicker, I am in need. All the time I used it the word need seemed the wrong word. I was doing her bidding in using it. I made it resonate with my resentment at having to use it. Until I kept going back to bask in it, in the curt monosyllable, time and again, drawn by all the potential energy with which it was invested. That is how icons are born. For how could I communicate without using the words that meant something to her. What matter if I used her word vindictively, with the painless bravado of a slave. I used her words to describe what I felt because I never had enough time or enough patience or enough courage to decide what it was I was feeling. So that whenever I was in the vicinity of a feeling, and feelings like ejaculations and deliveries are always premature, I registered and annulled it with a word. Not that my feelings were particularly subtle, they were merely fleeting. Or perhaps they were fleeting because I annulled them so quickly with the words of another. They were her words, I read them off some invisible slate of coercion. I could not be held responsible for the lurid images they provoked in my listener. I martyred my feelings to a sometimes beguiling chiaroscuro. So when I seemed to be all severed nerve ends, all lines of force deprived of its beneficent lodestone, then I called my chaos need. For the duration of the syllable, while I lived in the syllable, I was furthest from need, from the stench of need. I need you I said, and felt for the duration of the utterance on the right path, following the trail she had left. What if after the utterance I was torn between rage and relief, rage the fringe benefit of relief. For I had betrayed myself using her words. And sometimes I could not tell the difference between using the words to label a phenomenon correctly and shoving them back in her face, so much sand flung in the face of her importunity.

And yet the use of her words brought new feelings into being. Perhaps not the feelings for which they were labels, in the great world. And how I treasured the feelings that were not quite my own. I felt them as consigned to my safe keeping for a short time. For a short time I lived the life of men, no longer anachronism in any epoch. Using her

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words for my feelings I kept them submerged, protected them from the invasion of what precisely. Perhaps I felt that my hunger for reciprocity was then the result not of the world's indifference but of my own secrecy, abstention. I labelled my convulsions as need, I labelled sentiments before they were even on the threshhold, as need. But there was always a fringe that eluded all labels, took account of no labels, pricked me long after the labels had sunk back into my wastes. In short, I was all ebullition as my depths slumbered. But L. accepted me, or she accepted my use of her words, I deformed her universe by the misuse of her words. They are your words, I said to myself, I did not want my infirmities bubbling up into occasionally recognizable clinical entities, smelling of farts and piss, I wanted them dire beyond manifestation. The light of day pollutes. Occasionally they leaped like porpoises anointing their bellies with a little sunlight. Then they subsided, fed on the foam their leap engendered. She had never asked me what need meant to me. That she never did. There had been need before, in the Fall garden, and there was need now, and there would be need later when she was gone, abandoning me for my own good, to strengthen me for a final catastrophe that would be mild, doubtless, measured against these praxes. My own good, phantom, like the fruit of introspection. She came into my arms with no visible sign of reluctance, as had La Fall, toward the end, one with her tormentors. I did not know where her income was coming from but she survived without visible signs of toil. Which eased my conscience. To see her slaving away in the garden, planting onions, uprooting chives, that would be too much. She did not discourage me from my sorting and rambling. I described them to her as hobbies. For some reason I preferred she see me as a man of leisure, living off my rents. Once it became clear there were no dividends for martyrdom from her direction. My work for the post office I described as a hobby, mild mannered refuge for a large urban contingent fights a never ending battle against boredom, chaos and the Empedoclean way. She considered hobbies worthwhile, that was her word. Did she mean they were worth my wiles. I told her I was afraid of hobbies. Anything I might enjoy would deplete me for the voyage out. Only when I disliked what I was doing, when I fought against it as I did it, did I feel alive. She could not understand how hobbies depleted me for the voyage out. For the ultimate landscape was tame and its denizens drank ginger beer and egg creams until the wee hours. But for all her talk, the ultimate landscape was a blind alley into which she would never have ventured, except in dreams, where her agents festooned it with fey solicitation. She was too insulated from the grime. And yet she was at peace. I took her lack of guilt for venality.

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It was with a certain pleasure that she glided toward me, as on a gondola, I groped toward her in turn and toward the words of her world. I left in the morning and in the evening returned (chiasmus knocks but once in a paragraph). There was no alteration in her disposition over a wide interval, as with F. Nothing awakened her to my inadequacies. That was a little disappointing. When I touched her I asked myself, Do I touch her to call an emotion into being or to annul its opposite, the opposite of the tender and inquisitive, already fermenting. All I can say is, for the duration of the touch I was the touch. The touch was the emotion, no fringe. Nothing antedated, nothing survived. Renewed by internal monologue, the whey of a long loathing, I proceeded to touch more and more I touched. She was silent and submissive. I made use of her silence, I invested it with undertone, undertow, tinctured it with invective. In any case I strengthened it for it had to be strong, in every faculty and fiber, to withstand my long plaint against it. I adopted her conventions but not really. And then her words began to be accurate. They quelled whatever engendered the need for them. There was no longer a fringe that eluded.

At times the emotions to which they applied surfaced. Or rather the gestures that peddled these emotions saw the light. But I would always resent my concession, the incessant concession that fortified me too. I felt vulnerable at first. If I could read my own emotions then everyone could. I was a marked man. But it was better to use her words than to have taken the initiative and depleted my already dwindling arsenal. That would have been worse than any concession. And yet there are times when annihilation is to be preferred to concession. But I needed my stock of words, I was their mating ground, their culture medium for fortuitous juxtapositions. I was not trying to convey emotions, some inner convulsion was merely the pretext, the springboard, for those fortuitous juxtapositions that brought a new entity into being. And the new entity, that configuration of words, could be linked to a plethora of states. But I did not have that many words to depend on. And those I had I returned to, faithful customer. And they had begun to appropriate a little of the meaning of other words, they were less themselves than a kind of penumbra, aftertaste, of all that appropriation. I could weep and call the weeping a fart because fart was one of those words that sucked others dry. I could have complained about remembering and called it sweat. Because sweat was another word. Not just because laughter is sometimes a kind of audible sweat but because over epochs too lengthy to measure the word sweat had learned to absorb so many of the juices of nuance, from other words. Not that the word sweat, as it was for me, was not purged of all the

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stigmata of nuance. They had been evicted long ago. The word sweat, like fart, was neutral, an impediment in the way of other words, center of gravity of sentences of all shapes and sizes. As dapple for Gerard.

She renewed me, absorbed me without a spasm, without a flicker, without the least ripple at incorporation. Her cunt the quicksand my prick the wilting prey. Inside her I was free to utter primitive sounds, they provided enough light and heat for two. Because hers were the kind of moans and caresses that launch limp projectiles into a dazzling empyrean I was no longer afraid, no longer afraid just to speak, never mind if they were her words or mine. So we come to our lovemaking. I have skirted it long enough. We agreed on names for the parts of our bodies. Though sometimes I called thigh the space between the thighs. Because the parting of the thighs is such sweet sorrow. And what she called my cock was often the hair at its base or the base itself or my left ball when my cock was erect. Preponderant in the nippy air. In short, the night was a lawn in which we dug deep and in which more than puddles sprouted. But about her misnomers I was a little perplexed. Did she call what was not my cock my cock to demonstrate (to me? to herself?) its raw potency had metastasized to more inocuous regions of my body. I was all cock, then. Or was she disoriented and if she was disoriented was it from rapture or disappointment. Or from burgeoning desire or indifference. Or perhaps her strategem (for my investigation converts its target into a strategem) was therapeutic, to herself. To assure herself my cock was not dangerous since it was not concentrated anywhere in particular, ready to spring or fold. Instead it was a relentlessly shifting essence, an indispensable commodity in which my humps and hollows trafficked, and flat stretches too. But she began to give names to what was erupting before it erupted completely. That worried me. She was beginning to resemble Fall. I groped toward her and she called it curiosity before I had even amassed its principal, to say nothing of the dividends. And just before she achieved an orgasm she announced, I'm going to come, a little sadly. I did the same. But our motives must have been different. She must have begrudged me my participation in her ecstasy, a little muted for the occasion. Whereas I was proclaiming my aloneness, my fear of that aloneness, I was expressing expectation of a reward for all that semen to come (to come) a warning and an entreaty for mercy at my most vulnerable moment, I was calling the world to witness an event I could not allow it to bypass, I was attempting to stimulate her, to alert her to the need for appropriate activity on her part. But what still bothered me was whether I was one with my ejaculation, the proud harbinger, or reacting to it, an

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alien element. And I did not want to deceive her, I wanted her to know she would soon be flooded, no crevice unirrigated, so that she would not reproach me later, as my mother did when I wet the bed. Yes, that was it, a dizzying sensation, as incontinence. I told myself the sentence, I'm going to come, made no difference one way or the other. It was futile to decompose it, or rather the frame of mind that engendered it. But then I subtracted it from its moment and felt wildly desolate without it. So I knew it was there for a reason. In some way, it showed her I was in control, to the very last. My spurt was intentional. I was not giving way, as I moaned I only seemed to decompose, all fat gone sour.

Maybe when she said, as my arm advanced toward her middle, like the dove to the olive branch, You are curious about my thigh, she meant, Don't touch me. I swam anew in a sea of prohibitions, real or imagined. The old muck coated my shoals. But I could not relinquish my curiosity, I had to go on. I looked at her naked body and supplied myself with targets. But it was all pretense. There was no casual staking out of claims. I could not stake out targets the way an astronomer stakes out constellations. If I decided on her navel, my forefinger never landed there. Always a little to the left or right. It would have been too painful to coincide with myself, to limit myself to the realization of my aims. It was like fitting perfectly the coffin assigned you. My gesture had a trajectory. Who knew where my forefinger would be at the end of the trajectory. Whenever a part of her body overwhelmed me, unmanned me, breast, a thigh, a warm covert, then I instantly decided it was my target. As if I wanted to traverse the infinite distance between me and it. I confused its control over me with my control over it. But for the duration of a gesture I was calmed, I was the gesture. When a gesture expired I expired. She assumed I had a plan, some inner blueprint. But I was through with coordinate system. I was wide open to stimuli, vulnerable, unprotected. So that when I said this cunt ass cleft I was not so much pointing as announcing my homecoming. I did not so much stake out a claim as succumb to a claim on me. In short, I did not point so much as let her, or rather the parts of her that enticed, overwhelm, bring me full circle. She pointed through me. Ours was a composite body. And that composite body had no parts. At least, for the duration of an emotion, a gesture, that body had no parts. It was the gesture, it was the emotion. I did not annex her body, I was fused with it. Every point of that body on which a gesture came to rest was a point only later, in retrospect. The point was the end of a trajectory. There was an eruption and it had to play itself out, the

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eruption did not know where it would expire, the gesture did not know its endpoint. I was my need to come to the end of gesture, of eruption. I was all mind, all body, all surface, all depth, shot through with sad and infinite hesitation, like a sailboat on windy reefs, I was all delay and calm purposefulness. I was all things to all men, or to all fleas. For my being was a circus. But to her I was the prospector staking out claims. She did not share in our fused body. She was on the margin of the artifact. Her words were in me, on me, ready to erupt from me, they accompanied me on my way to her, my flight toward her. Perhaps it was from her I got the phrase, I'm going to come. I thought it was my own. I confused the ruthlessness of appropriation with the feverish pride of ownership. Her words irrigated me. I need you, I need you, I muttered as my arms went out to her. They irrigated my gestures, in danger of drying up from too much strenuous parody of self-effacement. But she was not interested in my long history of effacement, she was not going to reward me for so much abstention. What she was confronted with was a boor, an ogre, an insatiable animal. And she let me know it. But there were great awakenings too, where words played no part and decorum did not rear its ugly head. She played with my balls, brought them out of their great slumber, they slumbered and lamented in their hide. But she immediately regretted her frolic. I responded to her playfulness with slight pressure of the forefinger on various parts of her flesh. I accented her motions, I registered them. And at the same time I was responding to them, getting a foothold when they threatened to undo me. I wanted to restrain myself and let her take her pleasure, come what may. A forefinger is of inestimable value at those times. I spoke her words. Speaking began to invoke the opposite of what the words meant. If I said, I am in need, that meant, I am not in need.

As a reward for saying I am not in need when she was close to me I would be permitted to feel my need unequivocally, or the regret for the loss of the opportunity to say the sentence without ambivalence, further proof that I was truly in need. For when I said, I am in need, the aftertaste was one of exaggeration, pretense. And yet when I abstained from the sentence, there was a void, a hunger for the sentence. I believed that if I said, I am not in need I was powerful enough to invoke its opposite. But I pretended to myself I was merely dullwitted and very soon I would know by my state of being I had misjudged myself. I was afraid to admit my sense of my own omniscience. For I might be punished for my omniscience. Peddling my dullwittedness to myself I was exempt from punishment. The fact that I would feel need

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after I said, I do not feel need, was proof not that I was capable of invoking the opposite of what I said but that I was at a precarious distance from the world, inner and outer. I knew no more about my feelings than about whether the man beneath the streetlamp would attack me once I exited from the manor. And yet the fact that I trafficked with myself in such strategems was proof I was dullwitted in regard at least to my inner states. I fear, my confusion, my chaos, antedated all strategems. They were the background if only I could have channelled all my confusion into the manufacture of universes where all was still, where all was the calm evicted by a chaos beyond for once my ken. I had to get away from Livia for awhile.

I went back to Fall one evening. I heard a child say, She is planting radishes instead of onions. The break in her habit must be a prayer fringed with feverish expectation. For she had renounced onions and the sense of security their luminous bulbs afforded. And she was entitled to a reward. I must be the reward. Then she missed me. I found her in the garden, looking up at her tree, like a sparrow. But was she reverential or appraising. That I would never know, that would go the way of all ambiguities. She was measuring the distance between her and its summit. Or planning her ascent, having already determined the distance or quite indifference to the distance. She was beyond the stage of perceiving anything. I was so tired at that moment, I wanted to sink into her arms, forget my colleagues, my co-tenants, even L. persecutors all masquerading as the persecuted, gazes glazed with brutish defiance and even more brutish self-righteousness. But she sneered. Fumes rose from afar, incisions into the foliage, the fumes themselves a kind of foliage upon the sky. She wondered why I set such store by the varying grimaces of her routine. She had a right to radishes. I could not explain how she had trained me, over epochs, to the delirious misinterpretations of her signs. My training was now an object of ridicule too.

I wanted to engulf her and instead became a puddle to reflect her rays. She penetrated to my depths, I sang for the supper of her penetration. I wanted her to revile me for having abandoned her in the dead of winter, in the heat of the defense. She penetrated to my depths, I say, but perhaps I am confusing her with others, who left their insignia on all my acts, even those still gestating. And my acts, like my infirmities, were always undergoing several stages at once. The only way I got through their beginning was to anticipate their extinction, mime its motions in advance. So it is understable I was confused about where my prowess lay, if I indeed had any, and whether repeated failure was due to ineptitude or impatience, or scrupulosity of the most

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uncompromising kind. For if I actively sabotage my acts I did not have to endure the slow seapage of imperfection. I was blinded by my own overlay. And to me my impatience to have done was the impatience for a vantage, from which I was no longer corroded by what I produced. It was only later I learned the search for a vantage was a delusion, and all it did was dissipate my acuity. I was always confused about my acts. If I put one foot in front of the other then that movement embodied already coming to rest, in a hole, with my hands raised submissively above my head. That endpoint was struggling to get out all through the gesture, like potatoes through a sack haphazardly slit. The gesture was big with endpoint. So it was not so much the stare of others that sabotaged me as my own impatience to come to the end of all gesture. I made my feet do the work of my hands, my head, the future. I tried to empty myself into my feet until my feet literally, well not literally but not metaphorically either, ran away with me. My feet were constantly colliding with things and yet it took the rest of me such a long time to catch up with the collision, I had to traverse an infinite distance, through a wind tunnel. The wind tunnel of my own scruples, you might say. It was no wonder I craved her criteria for the simplest things. She was enough despondent with her own life to ridicule me, out of sheer exasperation. Or to reassure me, also out of sheer exasperation. Her criticism would forestall the dissolution of my acts, suspended from the time of her stricture. Stricken on my toes I would be. For I wanted them, my acts, to end and I wanted them never to end. A foot raised for all eternity I raised my foot in the garden. She looked at me. From the moment she began looking I was no longer raising my foot, I was playing at raising my foot, the raising of my foot was the making of an overture. She rejected it and condemned my act. She rejected it because I was not quite sure what acceptance consisted of. So for convenience sake all was rejection, nay, denunciation. One more act blacklisted, one more pretext for recoil. Next time I moved I would steer clear of the raising of the foot, it took its place in the archive, companion to the scratching of the balls with thumb and forefinger. You can understand how acting, moving, gesticulating, was becoming for me a steering clear of acts. I mourned incessantly the death of gesture. I was fast becoming confined to the wheelchair of my, what, fears, propriety. It was only my harrowing thirst for any kind of response from others, to confirm me in my phantom identity that pushed me, like a nursing home attendant gone mad with the routine and the aches and pains of the body politic (of which it is the phantom limb), into the fray of movement, collision, commotion. I came to her raw and bloody from L. I was not sure if it

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was the absence of L. or the memory of her strange words and gestures that made me unsure of myself. I needed F. She was my compass, her north pole my jugular. It was clear she couldn't run the garden, I taught her phrases that might aid her in her labors, might make the garden stand still for her instead of riding its stakes into adjacent bogs. Buoyed up by the sudden sense of what I could do for her in her exile, I was assaulted by the following phrase: I am the fertility of her garden, and also its feculence. The phrase comforted me, it appropriated all polarities. But after the phrase is over I am again in the middle, somewhere between the antipodes. Between rage and submission, between self-congratulation and effacement, falls the shadow. In the between I am paralyzed. When I repeated a phrase like crop rotation seasonally it ceased to make sense. I mean, while I was saying it, the farthest thing from my mind, from my grasp, was what is commonly understood by the phrase. It was only in speaking the phrase that I evicted it from my precincts, I evicted it and what it denoted. What it denoted no longer hovered, one more possibility that deflected me from the end of all possibility that was my one hope. I went on repeating it, as if repetition were the royal road to lucidity. For the duration of the phrase I was the phrase, I was not so much communicating with her as making a raid on the syllabary, extracting a pittance, dentist who inflicts no pain. Just as for the duration of her looking up the skirts of the tree she was the looking. But repetition made things worse. It did not restore to me a clearer sense of the meaning of the word. For one thing it exasperated her. She repeated the phrase. In her hands the phrase went from the senseless to the ominous. It was as if she had picked up something I hadn't intended. Some nuance. We fucked in the garden. Fucking relieved us of our rage. It was as if we were performing for a third party, the garden itself, rodents that hid in the shrubs, who knows. What is certain is that the defiance of our thrusts, our heaves, was meant for more than each other. And when she tied me up like an unwanted parcel with the neat ribbons of her thighs then I knew she was proclaiming something, but what, and to whom? Did she have her phantoms, too, with whom she achieved a feeble commerce from time to time? I wanted to get to the core of the fucking, by eroding the expendable layers of the act. But what were the expendable layers. Every time we fucked it seemed as if the fucking were an impediment on the way to the real fucking, way of passing the time until the opportune occasion showed its face. In that way I stitched a future for myself, from the mucky twigs of expectation, for her too, if she wanted to share it, and look forward with me, like me, to that perfect fucking

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that eluded us. Perhaps that ideal fucking would never take place. Perhaps I would have to be both inside and outside the fucking to be able to ratify it as a perfect example of what the world understood to be fucking. Everyone seemed to know what they were talking about when they said fucking. Same with masturbation. And yet had we ever verified communally that clinical entity. Talking about it was a way of warding it off. Doing it was even a way of warding it off. As I fucked, we fucked, I thought of my future, that gray abeyance, that nest from which birds emerge, at dusk, to sing, to lure with song the wary joyless neophyte, You guessed it. She tired of me. She tired of the fact that I did not coincide with my present, our present. So I evicted her before she could evict me. When I told her I was leaving and this time for good, no doubt about it, we both knew I had left long before. This kind of farewell was less painful than all the others, all the unspoken, for now I had actual motion, the saunter of the legs past house and garden, as a kind of solace. Whereas before I was leaving, left, and yet stood still, rooted to the spot, soiled in my fixity, aghast at my flight. In leaving I coincided with myself. In flight I came into my own at last. The selves that had come back before, resplendent in the garden's ooze, were my puny surrogates. I said, in order to say something, I knew I shouldn't have come. To visit her was to lapse from sorting and delivering, themselves lapses. I confused lapse with evasion, which it sometimes was, and lapse from a lapse with confrontation which it wasn't, ever, my mathematical training only confused me. It soiled me with too much expectation, like the silver screen. But what was confrontation after all, in its pure state. How did I begin to confront what I was supposed to confront. Perhaps it was when I began to hurt and wanted to flee the source of the hurt. Then I knew I was doing something for my own good.

I went back to the post office. I needed an interim before returning to Livia. I felt depleted. In order to resume sorting a large new letter had to be placed before me. I could not just dig into the heap. For a long lapse from sorting, from any activity worth a damn, was the interment of that activity. In this case, of all the letters I abandoned when I set out to deliver, skirt delivery, dump, philander. I needed the incentive of a recent postmark. Novelty protected me from coinciding with myself. As I sorted I felt something that felt like need. I rose, ecstatic, and hurried toward the manor. It was shrouded in fog. I thought I was going to cement our relation, I thought L. would be delighted to see me. But when I got to her, saw she was different from what I imagined, constructed during our separation, then I could only

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tell her that it was not her fault, that I was incapable of feeling need. So I was wooing her, as was my wont, with new evidence of my incapacity to sustain a relation. I am bad at relations but at commentary on the failure of relations I am a master, second to none. Perhaps my ecstasy in presenting my flaws masked my rage, at her, for making me run back to her, for making me need her without knowing if and why I needed her. I was running toward her with proof I did not have to be angry with her. Because the culpability was all mine and if she would only be patient I would rehabilitate, double quick. I seemed to be running toward the future but I was locked in the past. And the rehabilitation assigned me a future, with which I was most comfortable, especially when it was a long way off. In a sense I was running in no fixed direction with the news of my old flaws, I was running in all directions at once, laden with hymns to her beauty or to my ineptitude, dissipating my energy by running. By the time I got to her I was huffing and puffing and too tired to feel my need or its absence, whatever was more painful at the moment. I expected a reward, some tea, for being so swift a harbinger of my own flaws. And with a little time I would let them all unfold, before her very eyes. In a sense I was a travelling salesman. She took me in, as women do. But she shook her head sadly to show me it was all against her better judgement. But she reeked of decorum and would never evict me in the manner of F. As I drank my tea, gulping it, scorching my throat, martyring her to my babble and gurgle I found time to say, I am in need, or I need you. I thought something would happen once I spoke. I thought speech would be the envoy of all that was stored inside me. Instead it only catalyzed my cleavage from myself. The eternal question confronted me: did I say, I am in need, to invoke, in my omnipotence its opposite, or did I say I am in need, because I really was, or did I say, I am in need, to suppress the opposite feeling fermenting inside me at that moment. Or did I say, I am in need, to bring the need itself into being, to get as close to it as I could, to live in the syllables that seemed to emit a little of the stench of need. But speaking took me further and further from need, from all feeling, or perhaps it frightened the need away, for feelings are vigilant as cats in certain climates. Again and again I proved eloquence deadened me to my own resources or lack of them. But when I spoke I felt I was on the way to rehabilitation or something whereas I was in fact only stalling for time. She merely shrugged as I spoke. She distrusted words. She was willing merely to live, with me, without words, and take pot luck. I needed some kind of truce in advance, some kind of understanding, some kind of phantom eviction

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of all the flaws that might soil our entente, some kind of promise of punishment postponed for all the flaws that I would inevitably expose. I could not understand her distrust of words, her ability to live in the silence. I took it for insolence, indifference, even torture. She was the proud proprietor of the silence and I was trying to steal it, deprive her of its balm.

When I finished my tea she was asleep. More insolence. Sleep abducted her. I studied her in sleep. She looked flabby, vulnerable. I did not know what to do with her vulnerability. It frightened me. She slept with her mouth open. I was caretaker, I was keeping a vigil for another. She robbed me of vigilance on my own behalf. I could have murdered her just to have done with the abeyance to which she marooned me, by falling asleep. It showed she trusted me. How did she know I would not try to cut her head off, or caress her, as one does the dead. I was less tormented by ambivalence than the inability to accept it. I walked around the room, pretended to be comfortable with her sleeping and the manor sleeping and the footbridges half awake. When I at last admitted my ambivalence, my revulsion at her snores, her flitting smiles, I fell asleep. After that night I began a night shift. Midnights alone buoyed me up. I laundered my ambivalences in its stream. No downpour, no drizzle, just the smooth flow of its current. By dawn they were almost fragrant. Sometimes I thought I saw her through the stockroom window, at the depot. She was perhaps going to the city and she would return. She could not leave me high and dry. In the city there are no indiscretions, no ambivalences, the city gathers them up and converts them to haze punctured only by incessant neon. So much for the city. I was always surprised when cities to which I became attached proceeded to carry on in my absence. But when you walk the main thoroughfares of the principal ones you are their pulse and therefore indispensable. Perhaps she was leaving me forever, not merely for one night. How would I know it was the same L. who returned. She did return. She tapped at the pane. The clerks looked up, her gaze bypassed them discreetly. It was me she wanted, after all those years. I tried to identify her at a glance. I subtracted the scar left by the city. She was basically the same, a little more knowing, a little more schooled in unpredictable peripatetics like me. She had probably seen enough of them. Maybe I had lost my fascination for her. Where she came from my kind was a dime a dozen. She told me, when we were seated in the orchards beyond the pale of the post office, it did not answer my needs (answer my needs!) to work for the post office, sorting and rambling. It solves nothing, she said. She was changed. Gone the decorum of the

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lady of the manor. What is there to solve, I wondered, knowing well what was to be solved, or rather, what could replace plausibly the placeholder X in the sentence, X has problems to solve. So she was taking me seriously, all those chords faintly dissonant on the keyboard of infirmity were beginning to resonate. Though I always made a point of emphasizing my infirmities, I resented when someone took me seriously. I preferred they hear them as symptoms of my humility, noblesse oblige. Problems, she answered my unspoken thoughts. Could I assure her that to speak of my problems was to volatilize them directly. They were real, most real, when they lurked, rabid for a surveillance, condemnation, made to the measure of their intensity. Once you begin to speak of your problems, or rather once you make a blanket admission without stooping to the elaboration of particulars, then your laceration becomes gratuitous, self-congratulatory, refreshing, and much cheaper than all the therapies she was now peddling, in behalf of the quacks with whom she had probably had sexual relations. A shoulder bag was one of her recent acquisitions. Did she wear it to affirm her new sense of freedom or in mimicry of my vocation and its fatuous emblems. I have many problems, I said, conciliatory. But for the duration of the speaking I was the speaking and nothing else, there was no penetration to implied depths. I knew but did not say that after the words, the volatilization, the vapors of the evasion hang heavy for days, weeks, even years, like lianas on which strangle comfortably. I told her that self-knowledge came only when you were describing something a little to the right or to the left or up or down from yourself. And you learned also when you erected scapegoats, living and nonliving, and infringed on the rights you loaned them. That way prohibitions seemed to come from them. And you beat your head against their obduracy. There was nothing more suspect than outright, downright, upright confession. It was always waiting for applause or that look of revulsion that, to certain malefactors, is better than applause. But you don't describe anything a little to the left or to the right, either, she said. She looked away, blank, to emphasize her absence of malice or glibness, her inexperience in the matter of verdicts rendered. She emphasized the phrase, to the left or to the right, to indicate it did not come from her, was alien to her, she was quoting me, but she supposed I knew what I meant by, to the left or to the right. But the phrase could not be all that alien to her or how else to account for the little revulsion that seaped into her tone. But I deliver mail, I said. I describe my delivery to myself. You don't deliver because you want to. you deliver to prove you can still deliver, that you were not depleted

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from the last delivery. You deliver to sound the depths, not to explore them, to assure yourself there is no danger, you go through motions. I describe our lovemaking; I said softly. To whom? she flared. Fuck, shit, piss, tit. A degenerate case of exalted litany. She did not move. Once I said the words I did not understand why I had repressed them for so long, they were indispensable, how had I ever done without them. So long floundering before an accessible threshhold. For so long those words had poisoned other words, to which they loan a little of their stench. Out in the air they had no stench. Goodbye, edge of virulence. They had converted all other words, harmless words, neutral, exact, into sacks ready to split their seams. Now those words were restored to their purity.

She was impatient to get back to the city. And she did not wish to take me with her. That was why she was finding fault. She wanted to drink again at the city's trough, fatten herself for its maw. I understood her need to depart. What could I offer her, fortified with the world's words, which she recognized and understood in any context, without context even. When she left for good I waited for the sound of her footsteps down the corridor. She had come to the stockroom to tell me. But that sound never came to me, only sounds that were preparatory to the craved sound. Her going was peppered with injunction. Don't think too much, she told me. Her unspoken prescription for happiness as scrawny celibate was to lie in shadow and listen to rain falling on dead leaves. And in some part of me I was only too glad to let go of my thoughts. In the face of imaginary encroachment we have seen how I tend to discard. That clears a path toward confrontation, spares me the leap over impedimenta. Or rather, it clears me a path toward myself, so I know the self that confronts is the self in essence, all connections severed, like nerve ends. I am only too eager to relinquish what encroaches on my essence when I must call upon it in times of crisis. For I cannot hide behind a scrim of luminous decor, like a Von Sternberg hero or heroine, both, for in times of crisis I am restored to my status of androgyne. But I am only too eager to relinquish my essence, my privacy. It is only in the comforting presence of others that I impersonate one who is guarding his privacy against encroachment. What good is privacy after all if I cannot feel the incisions that affirm it, its reality, that is to say, its ability to be incised. She told me to stop thinking and I had a tendency to make objects of my thoughts. They cluttered my skull. Even when they were only the shadow of thoughts, in embryo. A fart, a belch, was enough to make me miscarry. It was then, when they were lost to me, submerged beneath the waves of my

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own detestable metabolism, that I strove toward them, as the hunter strives toward the wounded beast whose spoor is all but illegible, to appropriate, to round them off with the definitive articulation. The utterance refractory to paraphrase, that was the finishing stroke. But the more I groped the more the lucidity they held out eluded me. But then again, I always managed to articulate something, kissing cousin to a stammer perhaps, if not the thought itself, the flight that had not flown, then all the discomforts groping toward articulation caused me. In my stable there is no dung that cannot be converted to fodder. But it occurs to me that if I am speaking of thoughts then I should speak of them as if they were pebbles or pellets of compost. I should speak of them as if they were palpable entities in the real world. That would keep you guessing and enable me to pay my dues to narrative. Only there are times when one must burst the seams of narrative. This is one of them. The fruit of hubris is baptized in bile anyway. Anyway, I am most comfortable groping anyway, or at least I am most inured to groping. And if I am put off the scent then I proliferate symptoms to beguile my bewilderment.

I found it difficult to let my thoughts brew once she was gone. For to let them brew is to lose them, to await their disappearance in their offspring. Every time I thought of her I wrote down my thought, on one of the envelopes I was supposed to be sorting what did it matter. I hung them up on the mantle as it were, let them dry, I was warming them with my regret for their eviction. They fumed a little as artifacts fume when you unearth them. But there were other lists too, of my infirmities, her farewell gift. Her departure was not the cause as much as the occasion for their recrudescence. All along I had underestimated L. The decorum confused me. She had existed after all only to depart, to take her decorum with her. Whereas F. existed to persist, to be forever dimly visible. There are women who exist to depart and women who exist to persist. Dramas are elaborated from the futile striving of one species to be the other. Perhaps it is the same with men, though men have their deep voices and meager repertory of gestures, to disguise, or at least mute, their ambivalence. Nothing is denied women in the realm of gesture. Perhaps that was what restrained me in my gesticulation, the fear of being taken for a woman. But if I did not have a woman I had a list. By dint of repetition the entries become a poultice. There is lyricism in miscellany. Words send out roots that intertwine. Words that never met before are subjected to, begin to take pleasure in, juxtaposition. They fend for themselves, emit lines of force, saturate each other until you begin to wonder why you never

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guessed the instinctive affinity of the things they designate. From piddling poultice they went on to bigger and better things, namely agents of vengeance. I revenged myself on my infirmities. I applied names indiscriminately and they stuck. Perhaps their surprise at what they were affixed to induced the secretion of something like glue. To a malodorous suppuration of the balls I applied the label, peristalsis. And the suppuration stopped dead in its tracks. I said peristalsis and thought scrotum, slumbering in its hide. And so on and so forth, earlobe contorted by the wind would be known forever by the name scrotum sag in my dictionary of symptoms, lexicon guaranteed immunity to obsolescence because if you refuse to ride with the times then you are not uprooted by time's scythe. I even applied the names of infirmities to my most treasured talents which gave my foul-smelling phantoms no end of pleasure. But I forgot to say so eager was I to refrain from peddling the pathos of a last farewell, she pronounced my name accurately and with great conviction for the first time, upon leaving. She compressed so much that was unspoken into it, almost an idyll. Though a strockroom is hardly a place to compress an idyll into a minute or two. Well, in that one word, my name, she labelled me exhaustively she took everything into account. She labelled me more exhaustively than raindrops the leaves they crucify. She had much power over me at that moment. If she had said, Set fire to the stockroom, I would have done it. I had often asked myself if the hairs that lines the supervisor's anal canal were inflammable. But she restrained herself, she did not misuse her power. That's what you do when you've been educated in the best schools. You become estranged from your instincts and ignore their unsightly eruption in others. She pretended not to see my tears. So that when she said, You never cry, it was less commentary than edict. But why did she have so much power over me at the moment of farewell, function of departure or of the words she used at the moment of departure, and if of the words then of old words or words used for the worst time. They clogged crevices in my being. They created and clogged the crevices simultaneously, like music worth weeping to.

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Manfred Puetz

IMAGINATION AND SELF-DEFINITION

In his address at the National Book Award ceremony in 1953 Ralph Ellison stated that it was a shortcoming of contemporary American literature that it lacked "the passionate will to dominate reality as well as the laws of art." All those, he continued, who struggled with the shifting forms of the American experience should remember advice once given to Menelaus when he was in pursuit of Proteus: to grasp the eternal shapeshifter firmly and never let go of him unless he turned into the one form that represented himself.

In the years since Ellison's speech, American novelists have done their best to make up for this shortcoming (though maybe not in the way Ellison had in mind). Yet, at the same time they have rejected his advice. Their fantasies have come to dominate reality, but in the process of exchanging blows with it, they have merely accepted the forms of Protean existence.

One question has always been of extreme concern in the American novelist's struggle with reality. The question is, where does the individual stand in the context of this world or, in terms of a more personal perspective, what is the form of the hero's self as it is found among the forms of the world? At the end of the eighteenth century John de Crèvecoeur asked in his *Letters From an American Farmer*, "What is an American?" Ever since, such questions have been echoing and resounding through American literature, slowly changing their tone from the general to the specific, until they reflected the hero's strictly personal worry, "Who am I, this particular American?" The seemingly final stage of the quest towards self-definition was a stage many characters of the modern American novel shared with what rapidly became an assortment of international literary stock-figures. The "absurd," the "existential" and the "alienated" heroes of postwar fiction, on which we have heard such profuse comments, were all in the same position of striving for a definite sense of the self but failing to achieve it.

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Then a curious thing happened to some characters in the American novel. They were struck with apoplexy and instantly became petrified nonpersons. Jacob Horner, central figure of John Barth's *The End of the Road,* finds himself virtually diminished to immobility and nothingness in the Pennsylvania Station in Baltimore. He feels that this is the state towards which his whole life has been drifting with great consequence. Ebenezer Cooke, Barth's legendary sot-weed factor, sees his own person and others drowning in a snowstorm of alternatives which makes every move equally desirable and thus prevents his becoming an individual with definable contours. And at the end of Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle* the world itself is frozen into eternal immobility, and Bokonon, one of the main characters, has no higher ambition than converting himself into a statue, lying on his back, grinning horribly, thumbing his nose at his alleged creator.

Of course, the Cassandras of criticism maintained that they had anticipated this development long ago, since there was only one possible outcome of the hero's age-old struggle with reality. Via the stage of existential puzzlement, where the essence of world and self had vanished behind question marks, the stage of absurdity, where nothing connected with nothing, and the stage of alienation, where man's own creations had become so overpowering that they threatened to rub out the self, the hero of contemporary fiction had finally maneuvered himself into a position where life and all personal distinctions had been drained out of him. His frantic attempts to become a recognizable entity had ended in disaster—like Ebenezer Cooke's attempts to become a someone. "His windpipe glotted with a surfeit of alternatives....He closed and unclosed his hands and his mouth, and the strain near retched him, but it was all a dry heave, a false labor: no person issued from it." Thus critics like Jean Grenier had proved to be right when they noted that "we now walk in a universe where there is no longer an echo of the 'I.'"

And yet, this seemingly hopeless situation at the same time proved to be a situation of new departures. The experiences of Jacob Horner in *The End of the Road* are indicative of the solutions some authors had in mind for their characters. Horner is picked up by a bizarre doctor, who claims to have an unfailing therapy for all those who are subject to a total or partial loss of the self. It is called mythotherapy and is based on the existentialist assumption "that a man is free not only to choose his own essence but to change it at will." Life must be seen as a life drama in which man is invariably the author of the plot as well as the director who assigns all roles to the participating actors. "This

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kind of role-assigning is myth-making," the good doctor lectures, "and when it's done consciously or unconsciously for the purpose of aggrandizing or protecting your ego—and it's probably done for this purpose all the time—it becomes Mythotherapy." If you fail to assign a role to yourself, you will consequently become a noncharacter. In other words, loss of identity in this scheme is nothing but the failure to cast in this or that mythical story imposed on the world. The act of holding on to self-given fictional coordinates prevents existence from crumbling into nothingness. As Horner's mythotherapist finally points out, there is safety only as long as one lives the idea that "I" means "ego" and "ego" means mask and mask means role in a mythical scheme.

It is apparent that all this is parody. Its target is never mentioned in Barth and yet it cannot be missed. The doctor's philosophy is a charlatan's version of a belief that characterized and gave structure to the works of the great Moderns. Mythotherapy means the convictions and strategies of Yeats, Joyce, Eliot, or Thomas Mann, to name only a few, turned into the parody of an applied science. T.S. Eliot once stated in his review "Ulysses, Order, and Myth" that Joyce's use of myth as a manipulation of parallels between contemporaneity and antiquity is a method which should become programmatic for the Moderns. "It is simply a way," he described Joyce's technique, "of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. It is a method already adumbrated by Mr. Yeats...." Clearly, this method not only provided structuring principles of history, but also affected the way the self placed itself into history and the world. The parallels of specific myths and general patterns of archetypes provided not only a frame for the phenomena of surrounding reality, but also a stage script for any self that wanted to participate in a given symbolical drama and take its self-interpretation from there. In a way, this came close to emulating the Greek approach toward self-understanding. The Greeks had a habit of first taking a few steps back, as Ortega y Gasset once put it, before they tried to determine who and what they were. The distance permitted them to see the whole panorama of their mythological past, from where they then proceeded to choose an archetypal role or the personal example of a mythological hero as the model and basis for all ensuing self-definitions. Naturally, there are crucial differences between the modernist approach and that of classical antiquity. Thomas Mann, who himself frequently used mythical schemes in his works, specified, in *Adel des Geistes*, one of these differences. The relation of the classical self to its mythological past was usually one of identifica-

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tion. It was not: in this or that respect I resemble Ulysses. It was simple: I *am* Ulysses. Thus identification became reincarnation or reenactment of the mythological past in the flesh. As opposed to this strategy, the modernist approach drew more on a dialectic between identification and difference and played on the inherent possibilities of irony and distance. In short, while the Moderns might compare themselves to mythological figures of almost any given origin, they also stressed that they were not these figures. Similarly, the modernist use of myth as a provider of identities and the attempts of some of today's novelists towards the same end are different. I would like to sketch a few of the recent examples of this strategy so that the difference can come into focus.

Jacob Horner's stabs at mythotherapy clearly end in disaster. The gory mess at the end of his road leaves one of the participants dead (Rennie), a second one in violent desperation (Joe), and two others utterly uprooted and in flight from the consequences of their ingenious schemes (the doctor and Horner himself). Everyday reality has effectively repudiated Horner's attempts to turn it into a mythical drama.

The main characters of Thomas Pynchon's three novels follow a similar pattern from hope to failure and thus further demonstrate that home-made myth is a questionable strategy. Herbert Stencil *(V.)*, Oedipa Maas *(The Crying of Lot 49)* and a whole bunch of characters, from the determinist Pointsman to the puzzled victim Slothrop, in *Gravity's Rainbow* sort through the bits and pieces of history and their own world in pursuit of the one structure that will give coherence and explanation to apparent chaos. Though all of them try their hand at various speculations, hypotheses, and fictional or heuristic schemes they are unable to catch with the net of imaginative theory their objects of pursuit, embodied respectively in the shape-shifting V., the Tristero conspiracy, and a wide range of elusive phenomena from the rocket to the fact of World War II itself. Pynchon's characters thus occupy a middle ground between those figures of contemporary fiction who overpower reality with their imaginary inventions and those who succumb to it. Their fictional schemes, often dubious even to themselves, pose urgent questions to a reality which time and again answers violently or flatly in the negative. The inevitable outcome, by now fairly familiar from Pynchon's novels, is that the questers sink into a bog of paranoia, suspecting that all stories and projections are delusions, originating from twisted states of mind.

If Pynchon's heroes hesitate to rate fantasies higher than facts, hesitate to create coherence where it cannot be distilled from the debris

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of the given, there is no such restraint in some novels of, say, Nabokov or Vonnegut. Nabokov once formulated, in an interview, his belief that what we commonly call objective reality is a form of impure imagination. This conviction is tested by a long train of Nabokovian characters from Luzhin, Hermann Karlovich, and Kinbote to Smurov, Salvator Waltz, or Ivan Veen. However, few of them are as noteworthy as Charles Kinbote in *Pale Fire* who imposes his imaginary concepts with inspired stubbornness on the realities that surround him. His mythical dream of the lost kingdom of Zembla and the aftermath of the Zemblan revolution provides roles for virtually everybody in the novel and relevant niches for any event within his imaginary domain. So overpowering are the Zemblan fantasies whirling around his seemingly insane self that even the actual disaster of his friend's death cannot wake Kinbote up. Of course, *Pale Fire* is a very special case insofar as Nabokov manages to obliterate the borderlines between fact and fancy, reality and imaginary projection, to a degree where all certainties must crumble. Neither the precise identities of Shade or Kinbote nor their exact realtionship can be established beyond doubt. The only thing we can be sure of in *Pale Fire* is that we are never sure when and where the real ends and the mythic begins.

Kurt Vonnegut's novels abound in test cases for the new strategy of self-definition via applied mythotherapy. Eliot Rosewater *(God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater)* and Billy Pilgrim *(Slaughterhouse Five)* try to reinvent themselves and their universe, as Vonnegut puts it, using their imaginations to edge world and self out of their old moorings. Rosewater abandons his role as the head of one of the wealthiest corporations in the country and slips into a fantasy which permits him to become a volunteer fireman and build a new world around this image of himself. Billy Pilgrim claims to have been captured by a scouting party from Tralfamadore and begins to interpret world and fate in terms of Tralfamadorian philosophy. *The Sirens of Titan* in its entirety is the myth of how the histories of Mars, Titan, and the earth are secretely interlinked. And in *Cat's Cradle* Bokonon invents what amounts to a new mythology and religion for the people of San Lorenzo and assigns himself one of two main roles in a fictional scheme which explains history and life to them. Less subtle than Nabokov's heroes in their attempts as well as in their failures, Vonnegut's myth-makers pay a heavy price by either losing touch with humanity or, as in Bokonon's case, ultimately destroying the world.

To complete the picture of fancy's ambiguous domination over the world of the given, one might look at Donald Barthelme's novel,

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Snow White. Snow White and her seven friends Dan, Clem, Henry, Hubert, Edward, Kevin, and Bill live inside the revamped fairy tale of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. To the question of why she lives in this fable, Snow White answers frankly that it is due to a temporary malfunction of the imagination and that she has not yet been able to imagine a better story to live in. After a disquieting ending of the communal dream (Paul has been poisoned and Bill hanged), the remaining characters depart in search of yet another imaginary principle to live by.

Not that all dreams of alternative imaginary worlds stand on such wobbly legs. Apparently some fantasies command a larger measure of success insofar as they provide temporary shelter for their ingenious inventors, facilitate their self-definition, or bend reality until it fits an imaginary concept of themselves. Eben Cooke's fantasies of Maryland (*The Sot-Weed Factor*) are a case in point. "Dizzy with the beauty of the possible," Ebenezer Cooke gropes for defining contours which he finds in the fantasy of himself as the "Poet and Laureate" of Maryland born to praise the history and achievements of this mythical land. Of course, the real Maryland is altogether different from Eben's dream. And yet, after almost 800 pages and many deviations the innocence of his dream is shown triumphant over corrupt reality. In the end, Eben Cooke *is* the Laureate of a Maryland which miraculously has adjusted to the main outlines of his fantasy. *The Sot-Weed Factor* at the same time presents a protagonist who epitomizes the new hero's program to create his own form or rather multiple forms when he cannot find a naturally given identity. Eben's tutor Burlingame can live in any role: throughout the novel he is seen inventing and then slipping into a variety of alternative stories which center upon reflections of the facets of his self.

Similarly, some of Richard Brautigan's characters, who spin themselves into cocoons of mythical fantasies, are on their way to a naive fulfillment. In his novels *Trout Fishing in America, A Confederate General from Big Sur,* and *The Abortion* we see the different narrators, who are obviously *personae* of Brautigan himself, advance in the direction of an Arcadian dream which finds its fullest expression in the parable called *In Watermelon Sugar.* Here the mythical world of watermelon sugar, at once a location and the substance of a fabulous new universe, is shown triumphant over its rotten counterpart, the Forgotten Works, which are as clearly a metaphor for today's rejected world as the former is a metaphor for a surreal new Arcadia in which salvation becomes possible.

The purpose of these examples is to bring into focus the difference

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between the modernist use of myth, in Joyce, Yeats et al., as a framework for self-definition and the fictional strategies of contemporary mythmakers. Three distinctions can be made. First, the wild imaginary outbursts in the novels of Barth, Nabokov, Vonnegut, Brautigan, Barthelme, Pynchon (and several lesser known writers such as Ronald Sukenick, Earl Rauch, Rudolph Wurlitzer, Stanley Elkin, Steve Katz, or Earl Rovit) usually lead to intensely private fantasies which have no parallels or prefigurations in the past. In very few cases do our authors use specific historical models or "public" myths like the Moderns, namely as the subphenomenal framework or organizing principle for their works (Joyce's *Ulysses* is the classical case). Instead, recent myth-makers invent or let their characters invent brand new fictions which, as a rule, are inhabited and inhabitable only by themselves. They create the private myths of Jacob Horner, Bokonon, Ebenezer Cooke, or Billy Pilgrim. And though "private" myth, as Harry Levin once noted, is rather pseudomyth, because it does not imply a collective fantasy and because it lacks the wide recognition of its iconography, these fictional constructs nevertheless serve one of the age-old functions of all mythical stories. This is the function of providing, on a fictional level, unity and structure to an otherwise puzzling set of phenomena. In other words, what is copied in these novels is the attitude of the traditional myth-maker and not the stuff out of which he built his universe. (Admittedly, this makes the term "mythical" a dangerous label, because it can now be applied to all cases where imaginary constructs stand in contrast to, or overshadow, those ingredients of a novel which are borrowed from a world of assumed actuality. Yet this danger cannot be avoided, because there is no other accepted term available for the strategies in question.)

It is this general attitude of using the imagination and the mythic fantasy as a weapon in the struggle with the world which brings our contemporary mythotherapists close to the romantics. Shelley's programmatic "Defence of Poetry" left no doubt which of the two faculties of human understanding, reason or imagination, he thought superior. Partly in reaction to the neo-classical aesthetic which had one-sidedly favored reason over any other faculty, Shelley and the romantics declared the supremacy of the imagination and defined poetry (or literature) as its true expression. Epistemologically, the functions of the imagination were understood to be two-fold: "by one it creates new materials of knowledge and power and pleasure; by the other it engenders in the mind a desire to reproduce and arrange them according to a certain rhythm and order which may be called the beautiful

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and the good." The result is: "It (poetry) creates anew the universe." Hence it was not the business of the literary imagination, or any kind of imagination, to extract meaning from the universe but rather to endow the world with meaning. Even the correlation between an increase of disorder and an increase in the use of the imagination, more typical for our time than for Shelley's, was seen and accurately stated by Shelley: "The cultivation of poetry is never more to be desired than at periods when, from an excess of the selfish and calculating principle, the accumulation of the materials of external life exceed the quantity of the power of assimilating them to the internal laws of human nature."

Such propositions sound familiar indeed and the strategies deduced from them are those of many recent novelists. It has again come to this: if world and self have no definable contours, no richness of meaning in the context of the given, then unity and meaning must be created and superimposed on an indifferent world and an undecided self. This procedure is perfectly legitimate, John Barth claims in *Chimera*, because "...Art is as natural an artifice as Nature; the truth of fiction is that Fact is fantasy; the made-up story is a model of the world."

However, no full equation is possible between the ideology of our contemporary mythotherapists and Shelley's philosophy of the imagination. Shelley's dichotomy of reason and imagination, going back to Kant's famous distinction between "Verstand" and "Vernunft," saw the imagination as the higher of the two faculties because it organized, synthesized and thus unified the data of experience. For the contemporary authors and their characters it is less a question of synthesizing the given elements of experience than of transcending experience altogether, of passing on into realms beyond it. Though many of them seem to strive desperately for verisimilitude in their works, they actually make up new forms of experience after the old ones have failed and disappointed them. The awareness of this function intensifies at the same time a disillusionment which followed the romantic theory of the imagination. A great deal of postromantic disillusion stems from the recognition that the imagination, if seen as the faculty of synthesis, might as well be seen as its source and author. And if it is the source of synthesis and unity in the world, what is the basis of its claims to truth?

Our contemporary champions of fantasy, fable, myth—and all this means the creative and synthesizing powers of the imagination in action—are more aware than the romantics of the shakiness of their constructs or, more precisely, make their readers aware of it. Hence the

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second important characterization of their works: a sense of distrust in the very same fantasies that preoccupy them so much. It is a distrust which spreads from the author to the readers while it sometimes, not always, seems to bypass the characters involved. As emphasized earlier, most of the novels of Pynchon, Vonnegut, Barth, Nabokov, or Barthelme ultimately become case histories of failures where for disillusioned observers inside and outside the novel's home-made myths visibly do not stand up against the tests to which they are submitted. Mythophilia is in constant danger of turning into mythoclasm.

In fact, there is often more than a suspicion that the fantastic schemes which are at the core of such novels are not meant to stand up against adversity. The third prevailing distinction of these books is a sense of comedy, which, in this case, stems from the awareness that something has gone awry with the protagonists' dreams. Characters and authors alike realize that in every mythical drama somebody pulls the strings from behind the stage. And for this manipulator behind the scene, the scene itself is likely to become a world born of the blue air of fantasy. This awareness provides a dignified retreat only for those who can laugh about their craze for mythical order. Thus a sense of the comic undercuts almost all contemporary attempts at myth-making, implying, maybe, that the whole history of man as a myth-maker (or fabulator as Robert Scholes puts it with a slight shift of emphasis) is above all a history of futility, comic naiveté, and frantic struggles to pull himself out of the bog by his own hair.

Aesthetically, such a recognition might lead to an attitude which from Coleridge to Susan Sontag defenders of the self-referential character of the work of art have taken. Imaginary constructs, it could be argued, are neither intended to "mean" anything nor created to bring order, structure and stability to anything other than the works in which they appear. Maybe the home-spun myths of our contemporary novelists are fantasies which have no function other than being what they are or, at best, celebrating the inventiveness of their inventors. And who can call a fictional strategy a failure if it was never meant to be a success in the first place? In sum, there is a suspicion that in many contemporary novels the comic failure of imaginative projections has only one message to spell: fantasies should not mean but be. It is on the basis of such assumptions that Donald Barthelme can ridicule the attitude of all those who habitually assume that a novel must be more than a self-referential structure. In *Snow White* Barthelme provocatively confronts his readers with a questionnaire on the meaning of this book. Two of the questions read:

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9. Has the work, for you, a metaphysical dimension?
   Yes ( ) No ( )
10. What is it (twenty-five words or less)?

Where failure or alleged failure becomes obvious in the novel of the sixties, the mood is comedy. Where it is suspended, the mood becomes romance. The acid test for the success of the strategies in question is whether our contemporary fabulists and mythotherapists show any of their characters finally living and comfortably at home in one of the alternative universes which have been conjured up for their benefit. The test divides the inhabitants of today's fictional world into comic failures—who either celebrate, or lament over, a redetected contingency—and comic reincarnations of the traditional romantic hero (who forever lives in the fabulous lands where everything makes sense). In the latter case—approached as closely as possible today in Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor* or in Brautigan's *In Watermelon Sugar*—the American novel has turned full circle to become again what Richard Chase maintained it has been all along: romance, the genre of suspended probability, miraculous endings, and exalted meanings. Only, it is a romance which, ideally, is conscious of the way that lies behind it and yet decides to proceed a little further on this way.

It is appropriate that the final comment on this development should be reserved for a writer who clearly anticipated it. In his essay "The Literature of Exhaustion" (1967) John Barth maintained that contemporary fiction marked the stage of exhausted literary possibilities. However, he did not interpret this stage as an irrevocable end but as a new beginning. Fiction, he predicted, could easily draw from the reservoir of its historically actualized possibilities as long as it preserved a sense of where it has been and where it is now. Far from being a dead end, a literature of consciously recreated models of the past would become an ironic comment on the history of its genres and maybe on art as a whole. And thus it would deserve a praise similar to the one Barth had for Pierre Menard, a character of Borges's who in a singular act of historical and imaginative coincidence produced an exact replica of several chapters of Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. "His artistic victory...," Barth stated, "is that he confronts an intellectual dead end and employs it against itself to accomplish new human work. If this corresponds to what mystics do—'every moment leaping into the infinite,' Kierkegaard says, 'and every moment leaping surely back into the finite'—it's only one more aspect of that old analogy. In homelier terms, it's a matter of every moment throwing out the bath water without for a moment losing the baby."

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NEW ENGLISH POETRY

Three Poems by Deborah Evans

Whoever is sucked in; blown out,
Alone at the pinnacle of the others' affections
Must not look back or down
for whatever went before.

This thing, to see behind or down,
If one should be aware of where one is,
Would, as the cause of feeling how one feels
Cause the old feelings to return.

Circle and circle about
How the others now,
now they sense the fear of insecurity;

Circle, circle and probe about
Their insecurity will probe out thine.

And the fall does not diminish once it has begun
Only not to remember how one felt or not to have felt
The downward pleasure of feeling.
Yet to have felt as now, must I not be aware of the feeling then.

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It smashed us again
There is you lying there and me over here
With a headful of dreams.

And I to you, another galling flash
You have seen it before, but now you have learned the
advantage.
The peak, the growing oldness and the ground downness;
Something that may, but probably may not be something.

How may it be, that even we.....we may not be reconciled.

I cannot reconcile you with me
Although I do not tell you I predict what's in your head
The half-barrier of what you feel for me is up
and I have seen it all before.

It is a fear of what I knew before and the awareness have
reached since means nothing.
And if it could be, that you and me, we know
Would or would not our choices differ?

And is it of interest: me here and you?

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Sometimes it seems that he's coming in in bounds
Ecstatically loud in breathing soft,
nearer, nearer in me
And I, I as the soft grey head of the microphone,
am cliché calling after you
'show me what I am or who'

Escalating socializing,
Pushing, pushing—now it's here
Discontented, I am over there;
How like ambition, fantasizing
Long time grasping outweighs a short term need.

So it's backing off
Unrehearsed calling again
unforgivable availabilities after you.
A rock song sexuality
Barely can I await a second penetration.

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Three Poems by Alan Fuchs

NURSERY RHYME

When silver boys come out to play
The moon is tumbled in the hay.

When golden girls stay in to cook
The sun is pushed into the brook.

WITH A PRESSED FLOWER

The huddling trample of a drove of sheep
Tilts the loose planks, and then as gradually ceases
In dust on the other side.
Suddenly all the sky is hid
As with the shutting of a lid.
And he inherits soft white hands
And tender flesh that fears the cold
Nor dares to wear a garment old.
In his tower sat the poet
Gazing on the roaring sea
"Take this rose," he signed, "and throw it..."
Worn and footsore was the prophet
When he gained the holy hill;
"God has left the Earth" he murmured.
How they went home together through the wood,
And how all life seen focussed into one
Thought-dazzling spot that set ablaze the blood
What need to tell?
By no allurement can the soul be won
From brooding o'er the weary creep of time
(So goes the tale) beneath the altar there
Meanwhile he dared not go and steal away.
Then swelled the organ: up through choir and nave

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The music trembled with an inward thrill
As if a lark should suddenly drop dead
And roll their white surf higher every day.
What gnarled stretch.....is his!
My pictures.....
Smoothed down their knotted fronts and
Grew
As rosy as excisemen;
Some sort of heart I know is hers—
I chanced to feel her pulse one night.
I suck the last drop of the sky;
The quickening out-door influences
Of noiseless snow
We too have autumns
Are we then wholly fallen?
The drawbridge dropped with a surly clang
The happy camels may reach the spring
Beyond a crater in each eye
There is no English void.
With such large range as from the ale-house bench
We left her
With a drippingly hurried adieu
The electric nerve, whose instantaneous thrill
Makes next-door gossips of the antipodes.

THE WIVES OF THE POETS

Anna who was fat,
Jane who was thin, Beatrice was also thin,
Just as Iris was slender.
Petulant Doris, Susie;
Jane descended elegantly.

Leslie ate with her mouth full,
Both Leslie and Claire ate with their mouths open,
Maggie seen with another man
Sheila's tummy, arms and legs,

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The nails of Elizabeth,
Before Mavis cut her hair,
During Kate's pregnancy
Sonia in the lamplight between meals and afters
The mascara on her chin,
Opening the door to meet Felicity,
Who dropped Anna's handbag?
Hold your hands in front.

Revolving with
Nose is exquisite
In the red
Use your forceps
Use it.

Fat Anna, thin Jane,
Doris met Susie,
Susie & Doris
Anna had hay fever for four months
Towards Anna, the night, gurgling
For Anna.

Plied with Petula's bad grammar
The opus of Melanie
The fellow was right after all.
Moody, moody
Plastic while tending graciously
Upon a dot.

Irene of the many handkerchiefs
Jenny when she ruined her lipstick
To look out of the window.

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Anthony Howell

NARRATIVES

There was one who seemed certain to become very talented, but his mother cherished him more than she then did his father. Because of the certainty of talent in him he was always much the youngest in his year. Keeping up exhausted him. He became sick in thought. His father is highly esteemed in the universities, and he kept the sick in thought at home, treating him with the drugs suggested but withholding any treatment that entailed the analysis of thought. The drugs ate into the young man's thoughts and drove him mad. One day he went into a field a long way from the home of his parents and swallowed too many drugs and died.

There is a man who was married to one more talented than he is himself, and he left her with two children and she killed herself. Then he married a woman less talented than either his first wife or himself. She left him, taking the two children with her, and killed herself and the children.

There is one more charming than he ever was talented who will come into a fortune when he produces an heir. He loves boys and has been withheld his inheritance. Having enough to drink on, he hardly craves any fortune. He most loves boys who have been convicts. Getting on, he has decided that he could use a fortune to better the chances of convicts. He has found a wife and sent her off abroad with instructions to conceive.

There was a very talented woman who lived with another woman and a dog. Her brother, who had always thought of himself as talented, became jealous of the strength of his sister and avoided her and spoke of her as of a person with no talent beyond an unnecessary oddity. Then she decided to publish her thoughts, but those who published their thoughts in that market and those who came there to discover them would neither help her to publish nor show an interest in discovering her thought

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for themselves. Many had discovered that she was a woman who lived with a woman and were ashamed. To cover their being ashamed they too decided to speak of her as of a person with no talent beyond an unnecessary oddity. It was not a few among those who so dismissed her who thought of themselves as the lovers of dogs. For many years she was exiled from her market, but her talent never allowed her to become dissatisfied.

One married to a man whose thoughts were not quite talented enough was required to believe in her husband more than she believed in herself. The more she knew of him, the less able was she to meet this requirement, so he contrived surprizes in the home that would trap her into making mistakes. Then she left him and he killed himself.

There is one of considerable talent who lives alone. His has been a wealthy family. He looked forward to a life of talented leisure and let his talent grow. But his father lost all the wealth. Many who are born poor attempt to learn how to become wealthy while the few born into wealth practise how to live with their possessions. This one is singular in that he feels it his duty to learn how to become the poorer. So he lives alone.

There was one burdened with a name which was a virtue and looks which were the illustration of that virtue in a book. She was the quietest of dancers with a loud mother: but keeping quiet used to give her headaches. One of her own age fell for her because of name and looks, but she had chosen neither. Wild on the night that they met, she was wild on a second night five years later. But for the years between she had headaches. And after the second night she chose not to see him. She gave up even quietly dancing and married a respectable person who sold televisions. Then she went to a man she had always thought of as a wild animal. She turned quite wild herself and demanded that he eat her up. He did as best he could, but not being as much of an animal as she thought he failed to eat up as much of her as she wanted. Then she swallowed drugs and killed herself.

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One who married an exile went to live with her husband in a country close to that from which he had been expelled. Because he was a spokesman for his fellow exiles, those who occupy his own country sent commandos to blow him up in his car and shoot bullets into the mouth of another spokesman. Now she has become the most telling spokesman for the exiles although she was born abroad.

There is one who is very talented indeed. His father died and his mother has begun to demand much of him. For ten years he was living abroad, sharing his bed with this man and sharing the bed of that man. And he has learnt a way of smiling at his thoughts. His mother has rapidly become frail. So that she may be looked after he has come most of the way home and settled near enough to visit. He still shares his bed with men. Never does he share it with a woman.

There is a man married to one whom he admires and who admires him. He has allowed his admiration for her to arrest his own progress, while she has a sense that the wrong he has been doing himself is bound up with his admiration; so that when another questions her discoveries she can never decide what to defend and for what to apologise, and has been turning the progress of her talent into an excuse for anger.

There is one who became frightened when his wife became pregnant. One of his grandfathers had died just as the grandmother was bearing children. And before his own birth his own father had died. Both deaths had occurred abroad, but that year his talent seemed extraordinary so he stayed abroad up to one month before the baby was born. He became all the more frightened. After the birth his wife resented him for having avoided her during her pregnancy, and he resented her for insisting that the wellbeing of their baby was as much his concern as the nurturing of his talent. He tried to walk out and the baby died.

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One who lived alone and who was very talented had shown how the niceties of procedure govern the making of decisions and received a prize. Then his mother lost all sense of decision in such a way as to render him incapable of properly deciding anything. He did decide to take off his clothes on a railway platform, and when those who gave him the prize learnt of this they were ashamed. So they took from him all the means of living that went with the prize. Then this talented man started to travel up and down in his emotions: he worked slowly when he was down and was always fired when he went up. He was not at all strong but he was very large indeed. And he would walk in the streets being hit by people. He said that if he hit back the police would lock him up forever, considering him as dangerous as he was large. He went on going up and down and up and down, and then we learnt that the electric fire had set light to his bedding and he had burnt.

There is one married to a man of considerable talent who is the sister of another man of even greater talent, but she is not talented herself, although acute. Her husband would not discourage her from publishing her thoughts in the market where his own thoughts are already published and where her brother expected to publish his thoughts also. But when she began to publish, her brother started to consider that market cheapened, and he went looking for discoveries other than his thought and in no way suited to his talent. He tested his talent against drugs that might take away the memory of being talented. The drugs have eaten into his thoughts and all but destroyed his talent and utterly destroyed his chances of publishing anything in any market.

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Iliassa Sequin

remember them
ah! futility they said, farewell farewell

distress ever an' ever winter is their rest

an' yet an' yet

remember summers
remember fairies ah! elves
nightingales behind downs behind sunsets

once upon a time, spared were an' blest
an amber ah! a raven death

QUINTET 5

life you told is dismal, the summer is short
winters clouds endure, roses an' violets not

oh! on the forget me not
beauty keeps at bay
her own passing ghost
oh! women's beauty haunts

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I have ne'er seen the seas, the roaming breezes
I ne'er stirred the birds

decayed worn out mid wrecks
oh! my reveries astray went

many a freezing wearisome death, plaintive all the world
weighed, weighed upon my breast

before moonlight
before twilight oh! tell of fortune

why is it my life to be
savage oh! mournful with evil brimmed

oh! why why dim my eyes' glimmer an' glee

storm beaten by clouds, this falcon
"mine mine must be"
swift it rises, in darkness sinks

'gainst each one
or whether in love, silence ash alike alike we're

yesterday eve
of jubilee oh! purple sheen
together my darling we lulled

waylaid to day, horrid aghast, without forewarning
by fire tarnished oh! scarred we're

in turns o' soul, in turns of flesh
my love withheld,

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eternity, death
gold an' silver
an' maddening shimmer
coral sunshines
ruby-vaulted sunsets

oh! all in peril, outweighed, waned, burst

LOVE QUINTET

revenge, urge me dead
and waking
not knowing I cause so
"all too mute" loss
you, amorous

ah! what "has mattered had" grace
"gain" silence
"enfeeble" whiteness, unhappiest
ah! ah! ends
tender tenderest thes' eyes
keen green'll release seas
you, amorous

waste these dreams within me
ah! vice sweet

ah! vice sweet
"suited peace" suns
ah! perchance too glorious, thos' of coral

complexions glowing
thos' to go
their own sorrow

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dispersed, dispersed, fresh death
lassitude

oh! hues for oblivion
to choose, amorous
blackness white
thes' nights
thes' hidden be
thes' blindness release
seeing sapphire, fire endless

again again
"lay played" an' haste evenings
mid daffodils mid isles fields

'gain ah! 'gain chance, magnificence
sands sanguine asleep 'gain ah! 'gain
"lay played" an ancient conquest

again, again, wandering

coast to coast ashore
shadowing over
her remembrance

asunder, her termless glittering lips
asunder, flower, fear, buds to buds alarm
sun sunken lands
"pass" remote mute
a remembrance afar

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Lee Harwood

MACHINES

1.

In the darkness you could hear hooting noises, ahead?
somewhere "out there". As though ships were passing in
the nearby estuary. Or maybe a distant freight-yard.
In such blackness the strings of yellow lights
"illuminating the scene" could only be imagined. The
stacks of timber and oil drums, the quiet of the night.

Across the field maybe the dark outline of a wood.
That's another possibility.

Enclosed in such a state. The dark pressing in, felt
brushing one's face and hands, "the soft fur of nights".

2.

In the darkness of the cottage, midday, and the large
stone fireplace filled with wood ash.
Up behind the cottage the beech woods, below, the steep
green slopes down to the valley. The trees and valley a
soft grey white with the mist and drizzle of early autumn.
In the darkness of the cottage...
"breaking down at the
continual brutality of it all, and my failure, once again.
The tears flow down my face. I bury my head in the arms
of the woman I've also failed."
A mile and a quarter walk away a black farm raincoat lies
neatly folded up beside a tall hedge with a sharpening
stone and bill hook laid on top of it.

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3.

IMAGINE an elegant octagonal room with a high ceiling. The room is about 30 foot across and has french windows along the four sides of the room that face south. These windows look out over extensive lawns that finally end in a shrubbery and woods. It is a summer afternoon with clear blue skies as far as you can see. The time is about 2:30 PM.
The room itself feels pleasantly warm and airy. The walls are painted white and in their decoration and the matching mouldings on the ceiling show the house to be built in the 18th century in the Georgian neo-classical style. The floor is parquet and polished to a fine and rich glow. The only furnishings in the room, which is otherwise bare, are a Persian rug and a small table. The rug lies on the north side of the room and measures 10 foot by 6 foot. Its colours are generally lighter than usual and the abstract design less elaborate. The small oval table stands in the middle of the room.
On this table stands a machine of some sort, or maybe it could better be called a mechanism or instrument. The instrument is about 3 foot high and at its mahogany base measures one foot by one foot. The overall impression is that of a neat and complex arrangement of brass joints and mechanical parts, and shiny steel rods, all in motion that is both smooth and dignified. Atop the mechanism a steel foliot rod rotates slowly, the two brass balls at either end glinting as they turn. This escapement regulating, as they say, the transfer of energy from the spring to the various gears. The whole machine is a combination of many such correct regulations. Stepping back from it and closing your eyes you hear well oiled clicking noises against a background of the distant noises from the gardens outside. A blackbird singing and the sound of a small group of people approaching the house.

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Three Poems by John Welch

IN THE STREETS

Habitual insolence the streets encourage:
Flexing the muscles before daybreak
The ones little used, then passed by hands
Over the flat and the vertical areas
Gazing into the eyes of approaching motorists
Who gnaw the wheel accommodating miles...
The muscle halts by here
In its cultivated rags mid splinters
Of the valuable flask, lapsed cloths of sunlight
Being calm under an always turning heel.
I am the wax archangel and the
Catalogue of cars, the useless rain
Leans inward past impenetrable churches,
Stone valves blackening down the years.

THE DROPS OF WIND

The sunlight brought them out, this bunch
Of aliens, tulips in their beds, striped pals,
Foreign students studying in the parks,
Huddled in deckchairs. 'Ach your wezzer...'
Tiring it is, to have to gather
The drops of wind. Yoko was telling us
About the cherry trees in her land.
Fractured grace and lyric wind
Still proved bothersome. The Underground
Was full of songsters whistling to guitars.
The clouds glowed darkly. Later, clearing skies
Turned pale blue early evening. Someone's mother
Was bending down to say hello like lilac.
On the wind's blunt knife our blossoms cooled.

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MILLIONS

People against a background of insects.
Worn pavements enjoy the luxury of air.
Our sky is lifetimes of measuring.
Our spiral interiors are weathered, exposed.
Another day dawns everlastingly.
Its resurrection storms the panes
In smeared inscriptions of rain.
A gust of wind and dog bark,
Imagine why the plants growing.
The tower blocks are full of voices
Their tidings of evening a fragile bundle.
We settle, quivering like ashes.
The cactus is drowned in its growth.
The millionth day: the sleeping city.

Three Poems by Peter Ackroyd

'THERE ARE SO MANY...'

"There are so many useless things to be done
and, conversely, there are external forces
which can no longer be organised or controlled."
Think of all the leaves on a single tree
and the way that winter pulls them down
until nothing in the wood will grow.
Connections must now be made with human love,
as if it were a story in which the ending
has never been understood. I am going on with it
just to see what happens.

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On page one the children stretch their limbs
and then on page four they run into the forest
where giants part the leaves and peer at them.
On page thirteen the darkness grows like a tree,
and this is the part that no one understands.
It might be better to begin at the beginning
and read the story for examples of bad grammar,
sloppy characterisation, literals and so forth...
"At night I like to look up at the stars
and when I wake up I am glad to be alone,
just as things are brightest when they are stopped
in mid-career."

'THE GREAT SUN...'

The great Sun wastes its energy upon small objects
and catches me in the art of being myself,
I can relax a bit while the light rushes by
past the houses and the people in the houses.
A general English melancholy settles down
as the birds dip their beaks into the earth—
the flies have had a long life this year as well
but a hand may pass across the Sun
and I will not understand these things.

The light falls across various emotions
until they become the simple idea of myself
at the foot of a crag, for instance, enduring
the fear of death
as my breath streaks across the firmament.
Actually, the light has vanished through a gap
in these personifications,
the sky is changing into a map of the new order
and I am left behind in the march of events.

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ON ANY KIND OF NOVEL

So this is the way it should be,
with everything there just to be described—
like landscapes, seascapes or family portraits
which seem most real when they are not so.
If only it could always be like this
and then I might hit upon some true feelings;
outside, the girls are singing 'Ragtime'
and then of course I start singing it too.
Ah these people, I wish I could immortalise them
like Ronald Firbank or even Graham Greene...well,
they are wearing sweaters saying 'Crisis? What Crisis?',
their breath can be traced like pale branches,
here today and gone tomorrow OK?

So winter is coming in, and the self fades
and flickers; we read novels late into the night,
watching helplessly as characters race toward each other
until the screams and whistles finally die down
and a faint violet spreads across the margin.
So much has been written about this light, both for
and against, I don't know how to begin—
where the stars go? how the day starts?
Angel Clare bows his head against the wind,
thinking about the things he has to do today:
if I come out into the open will I be myself,
or will it be the beginning of another story?

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Fiona Templeton

QUOTATIONS

"In repeating the action, you may concentrate on the lifting of the teapot and therefore risk warping the action or you may concentrate on the space and speed of the action and risk missing the teapot.

Of course the teapot was originally lifted, but the object is as geometrically incidental to the action as is the dust on the floor.

The pretence of weight in a hand which had missed the teapot would place the action in an ideational rather than an actual context.

But the possibility of continuing the original action after grasping the teapot is dictated by the entry of the object.

The possibility of non-fulfilment of the expectation of a required ingredient suggests a physics of surprise."

* * *

"The model is the subject not just in the sense of the topic, but in the grammatical sense of the protagonist, although passive.

Let authority be the voice of the subject, rather than the mood of the verb.

Subject is the invisible product of any juxtaposition."

* * *

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"Some people want it to be the way they behave as if it is.

The discussion of artistic mimesis always leads to a discussion of mimetic suicide.

But the possibility of continuing the original action after grasping the teapot is dictated by the entry of the object.

And since the art is of the situation, the purity of the medium is not affected by its reality.

The fact of whatever communication there is becomes a third role."

* * *

"Have verbs anything to do with cause and effect?

The art of science constitutes the suspicion of language.

Does possibility come first?

The qualities of the fact are conferred on its expression, and the fact forgotten.

Short-sighted people see auras in street-lamps.

'Seules les décisions arbitraires permettent à l'homme de fonder quoi que ce soit.'

Paul Valéry

'Only arbitrary decisions allow man to found anything.'"

* * *

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Max Byrd

THE MADHOUSE, THE WHOREHOUSE, AND THE CONVENT

In eighteenth-century England the three houses of my title make one home, at least metaphorically. Readers who find themselves bored by the optimistic, official humanism of the Enlightenment—or even hostile toward it—may be surprised to hear these places spoken of as typical of the century in any way. But the truth is that all three served the literature of the Age of Reason as symbolic prisons, where irrational energy was locked away from normal society. Everyone who has turned the pages of many eighteenth-century novels will recognize these houses as residences for rogues and carnal hypocrites of all kinds, as well as ordinary destinations for abducted heroines, orphaned waifs, and hapless heirs. What may not be evident at once is the sense of *preoccupation* that their numbers finally convey, preoccupation with the obvious dangers of unreason, but also a certain barely disguised fascination with it. In the end their presence across that formal, rational landscape seems to stand as an acknowledgment not only of the stubborn persistence of irrationality in human life, but also of its necessity.

Within the confines of a sometimes dogmatic eighteenth-century humanism, in other words, runs a countercurrent of literary energy, straining against precisely what we sometimes strain against in its writing. The famous exuberance of the period's masterpieces—of *Tom Jones*, for example, or *Moll Flanders*—is one sign of these pressures. The connected meanings of madhouse, whorehouse, and convent are another. Hence the madhouse as Hogarth pictures it at the end of *The Rake's Progress* functions as a symbol of equivocal imprisonment: a grotesque and squalid row of cells whose inmates, although supposedly shut away from the eyes of other people, are nonetheless visited in the painting (as they were in life) by the curious and cruel from outside, by the sane. Bedlam's doors fly open in this way throughout the

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century, whenever one writer or another wishes to point to a moral like Hogarth or to underscore the awareness so widespread in the period of the difference between reasonable men and brutal, impulsive animals. The whorehouse works as the same kind of repository for failed human beings: a punishment for imprudence, but also a place of secret transaction between outwardly virtuous men and the women who both serve and represent their animal passions. In apparent contrast, convents are intended to stand as retreats from such passion, or at the very least as places where the pulsations of irrationality can be controlled. But the convents that crowd the Gothic and sentimental novels of the last quarter of the century subvert this pious image time and again, with massive revelations of hypocrisy and with outbursts of sensuality that are somehow intensified by isolation. ("Madam," Samuel Johnson pointedly remarked to an abbess, "you are here, not for the love of virtue, but the fear of vice.") We may even come to feel along with Diderot and the Marquis de Sade that dissolute monks and nuns lash their charges, literally, in an effort to make manifest human wickedness, to bring it out, as much as to thwart it. To the outward eye, then, the winds of Aeolus himself are not more securely confined in their mountainous cave than the violent irrationalities of these three prisons. But what we see paradoxically in every case is constant traffic, unflagging and often obsessive, between the great world of Enlightenment society and the smaller, darker world of unreason that society denounces and yet secretly visits.

"It may suffice to tell you for the present," Daniel Defoe writes in the *Review* of a young heiress abducted to a private madhouse:

> they kept her bound Hand and Foot in her Bed, such a one as it was, and ty'd to the Bed Post for several Days, reduc'd to strange Extremity, beat and pinch'd her by cruel and barbarous wretches called Nurses, and forc'd nauseous Draughts down her Throat, which they call'd *Physick*, and which she, being apprehensive they design'd her Destruction, and might poyson her, *refus'd*; but they forc'd her Mouth open with Iron Instruments, and pour'd into her, what they thought fit, wounding her very much with their Violence and Inhumanities.

Even the most casual reader will respond to the titillations in Defoe's account, the erotic overtones of Beauty and the Beast that make it sound like an eighteenth-century version of *The Story of O*. Defoe, of course, would describe it as journalism, a plea for reform of a widespread social evil in contemporary London; but as so often happens in

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his writing, the sensationalism of the subject together with his own fabulist instincts transform reportage irresistibly into melodrama. As his campaign against the abuses of private madhouses continues, these tormented victims of greedy husbands, fathers, and children turn into plausible forerunners of the heroines of Gothic novels: "During her confinement," he writes of another case, "the Villain of the Mad-House frequently attempted her Chastity; and the more she repuls'd him, the worse he treated her; till at last he drove her mad in good earnest."

A few years later in *Clarissa* Samuel Richardson echoes Defoe's related themes of money, dark sexuality, and madhouses. At the same time he strips away the covering of the whorehouse and reveals the hideous life within. The death of Mrs. Sinclair, owner of the brothel where the heroine Clarissa had been kept a prisoner, leaves us with a stifling impression of confinement and revulsion; and its very repulsiveness works in the end to indict not simply Mrs. Sinclair's perversion of her sexuality, but even that sexuality itself. Her pain and fear make her howl on her bed more like a wolf or a bull than a woman. And as he looks upon the women of her house:

> risen perhaps from their customers in the fore-house, and their nocturnal Orgies, with faces, three or four of them, that had run, the paint lying in streaky seams not half blowz'd off, discovering coarse wrinkled skins [the narrator imagines himself brought down to the underworld] in one of the infernal mansions.

He feels poisoned by the contaminated carcasses of the whores and hurries to a window: the atmosphere, he says, "gave me no imperfect idea of the stench of gaols, which corrupting the ambient air, gives what is called the prison-distemper." This house, too, like the imagined madhouse and the debtor's prison, once enclosed Clarissa, "that angel."

The sickened recoiling we make from Mrs. Sinclair's death bed may remind us of only a few other moments in English literature: of that moment in *A Tale of a Tub*, perhaps, when Swift draws us near the bars of the Bedlam cages; or those descriptions Swift again gives us of the Yahoos (themselves like Bedlamites) and of women undressing in his poems "Cassinus and Peter" and "A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed." And indeed, Richardson himself calls our attention to the comparison, claiming only that his description is more "decent" than Swift's, and used for a better purpose. But the purpose behind these moral portraits tends to dissolve before the energy and grossness of the writing:

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> Behold her then, spreading the whole tumbled bed with her huge quaggy carcase; Her mill-post arms held up; her broad hands clenched with violence; her big eyes, goggling and flaming-red as we may suppose those of a salamander; her matted griesly hair, made irreverend by her wickedness (her clouted head-dress being half off) spread about her fat ears and brawny neck; her livid lips parched, and working violently; her broad chin in convulsive motion; her wide mouth, by reason of the contradiction of her forehead (which seemed to be half-lost in its own frightful furrows) splitting her face, as it were into two parts; and her huge tongue hideously rolling in it; heaving, puffing, as if for breath; her bellows-shaped and various-coloured breasts ascending by turns to her chin, and descending out of sight, with the violence of her gaspings.

The grotesque, "convulsive" sexual rhythms of Mrs. Sinclair's death here seem part of the narrator's furious moral perception of her, and his (and our) condemnation mounts in fury as we grow closer, urging us to anger almost out of control.

Clarissa is structured by oppositions, as commentators have long understood, by clashes between the virgin and her violator, for example, between the aristocracy and the middle-class, between men and women. From this point of view Mrs. Sinclair's death simply serves Richardson's purpose of blackening her character in unsubtle contrast with Clarissa. But at some disturbing level, I think, the opposition begins to dissolve. Clarissa's and Mrs. Sinclair's hysterical entrapment in the same prison-like brothel and the sexual connotations of their deaths actually suggest an identification between them. In those angry descriptions of women which Richardson criticizes, Swift intended to expose the nature of female deceit and to make us hate it, but the woman so flayed need not be a whore. Both Swift and Richardson speak for an age intensely distrustful of unreason, especially distrustful of its ancient "vessel," woman. And although Mrs. Sinclair or an amorous female Yahoo clearly embodies unreason for any audience, it is the great paradox of Richardson's novel that the virginal Clarissa, who meets the same fate of imprisonment and punishment, is just as certainly linked to unreason. She does not embody unreason in herself, but she is the cause of it in others. We see her special, subconscious connection with unreason strikingly in her hold over Lovelace's imagination: she charms, she bewitches, and she drives him, he claims, to the insanity of rape. And when he has drugged and raped Clarissa and finally conquered, she then reasserts herself. In one of the finest scenes of the novel, as Lovelace sits drinking among his whores, the door flies suddenly open and she enters triumphantly, "confiding in

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her own innocence; and with a majesty in her person and manner that is natural to her; but which then shone out in all its glory!" What we feel most strongly while she strikes villainy dumb is Clarissa's power, her queen-like command in innocence as well as in desirability. She enters the brothel precisely as does Marina in Shakespeare's *Pericles*, and like Marina she dominates men's minds by both her virtue and her sexuality—for such a scene would be meaningless if the heroine failed to inspire the lust she overcomes.

Clarissa's virtue, then, provokes unreason in men like Lovelace. But the idea goes further. In *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* Maud Bodkin pointed out two archetypal expressions of women in literature, sometimes located in the same character at different moments in the same work (Eve in *Paradise Lost*, who is both temptress and chaste lady), sometimes shown separately (Artemis and Aphrodite in *Hippolytus*: Beatrice and Francesca in *The Divine Comedy*). In either case the image of a woman takes a powerful hold on the male passions: "The tyrannous grasp upon man's emotion possessed by the dynamic image of woman in its aspect of cherishing, satisfying, exalting, adds to the terror of its other aspects as enslaving, betraying," she writes. The virgin forever being abducted in eighteenth-century fiction may be understood in part as a disguised image of that irrational, passionate woman who both enslaves and degrades. We have only to think of Swift and Pope to recall the eighteenth-century contexts of this view of woman, but we can also look past them. In Fielding's *Amelia*, for example, the hero has been sent unjustly to prison:

> A very pretty girl then advanced towards them, whose beauty Mr. Booth could not help admiring the moment he saw her; declaring, at the same time, he thought she had great innocence in her countenance. Robinson said she was committed thither as an idle and disorderly person, and a common street-walker. As she past by Mr. Booth, she damned his eyes, and discharged a volley of words, every one of which was too indecent to be repeated.

The Tatler is even more plainspoken:

> The *Prude* and *Coquet* (as different as they appear in their Behaviour) are in Reality the same kind of Woman; The Motive of Action in both is the Affectation of pleasing Men. They are Sisters of the same Blood and Constitution, only one chuses a grave, the other a light, Dress.

(We may also be reminded of that unsettling resemblance between another set of polar opposites, criminals and cops, which sociologists

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have recently studied.) In a period when old myths are breaking down, it often happens that an archetypal character, obeying a kind of survival instinct, takes on its opposite role. The eighteenth century is emphatically such a period of transition; and there is clearly a way in which Clarissa, like other virginal figures, suggests her opposite, releasing a maddening unreason in an already unreasoning male. At one point, moreover, she asks Lovelace to send her to a private madhouse, calling it ironically a "happy refuge" from his passion, but when we recall the association of madhouses and cruel, erotic usings, we may discern a further, unconscious irony in her request. "You may observe," Johnson says, "that there is always something Clarissa prefers to truth."

There is a second way, however, in which Clarissa can be seen mythologically. Her incarceration can be universalized into that ancient, still terrifying story of the goddess Persephone and gloomy Dis, the ravishing abductor who carries her down into dismal confinement in the very kingdom of death. (Marina is another such Persephone.) And since myths are so often stories about the human mind itself as well as other matters, the internalizing application of the plot would have been well understood by the eighteenth century: a view of the human personality in which reason and unreason rock back and forth in fierce struggle, a struggle whose terms are sexuality and death and whose boundaries are the rough, inflexible walls of some confining cell: prison or madhouse or coffin.

In the first half of the eighteenth century the primary meaning of the incarceration that occurs over and over in fiction is restraint. Unbalancing, socially destructive passions like greed or lust are simply pressed into submission by moral and social institutions, by the madhouse and the prison. In the later eighteenth century the primary meaning of incarceration becomes, not restraint, but burial, a meaning already implied in the Persephone myth. The dungeons in these houses are Tartarus, the deepest recesses of the human mind in which unreason still clings to life. Toward the conclusion of M. G. Lewis's *The Monk* the hero Lorenzo, searching through subterranean passages, stumbles upon the following:

> in a corner of this loathsome abode, a creature stretched upon a bed of straw, so wretched, so emaciated, so pale, that he doubted to think her woman. She was half naked: her long dishevelled hair fell in disorder over her face, and almost entirely concealed it. One wasted arm hung listless upon a tattered rug, which covered her convulsed and shivering limbs: the other was wrapped round a small bundle, and held it closely to her bosom.

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Thus far we might feel we were reading another description of justly punished whores in Mrs. Sinclair's brothel; but the next sentence places us elsewhere: "A large rosary lay near her: opposite to her was a crucifix, on which she bent her sunken eyes fixedly, and by her side stood a basket and a small earthen pitcher." The convent in Gothic novels, outwardly a symbol of self-control and reason, in reality exists as a den of incarceration, just as the madhouse and the whorehouse do in earlier literature; inwardly it harbors row after row of dungeons like this one in *The Monk* where unreason is shut away. Within the farthest reaches of this building, learns the heroine of *The Italian*,

> is a stone chamber, secured by doors of iron, to which such of the sisterhood as have been guilty of any heinous offence have, from time to time, been consigned. This condemnation admits of no reprieve; the unfortunate captive is left to languish in chains and darkness, receiving only an allowance of bread and water just sufficient to prolong her sufferings, till nature, at length, sinking under their intolerable pressure, obtains refuge in death.

The scene Lorenzo discovers in *The Monk* reminds us of numerous other eighteenth-century descriptions of Bedlam cells as well as of brothels—of Hogarth, Swift, and Smollett's *Sir Launcelot Greaves*; we see again that just as in *Clarissa* these prisons are inhabited by women. The bundle an inmate clutches is the corpse of her baby, an emblem of her original female sin. Other women in the novel are also sisters of Clarissa or Mrs. Sinclair. The bleeding nun Matilda (in reality a devil) cries out at the point of death: "I lust for the enjoyment of your person. The woman reigns in my bosom, and I am become a prey to the wildest of passions." She appears as a Sybilline figure, combining irrational prophecy with the erotic symbol of a dagger:

> The monk beheld her with anxious curiosity. Suddenly she uttered a loud and piercing shriek. She appeared to be seized with an excess of delirium; she tore her hair, beat her bosom, used the most frantic gestures, and, drawing the poniard from her girdle, plunged it into her left arm. The blood gushed out plentifully.

And like Marina in the whorehouse she commands the submissive male:

> But a few days had passed, since she appeared the mildest and softest of her sex, devoted to his will, and looking up to him as a superior being. Now she assumed a sort of courage and manliness in her manners and discourse, but ill calculated to please him. She spoke no longer to insinuate, but command....

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In France, where so many girls of the middle and upper classes were actually educated in convents, the sexual hypocrisy of nuns and monks becomes a hackneyed joke in the eighteenth century. But from the middle of the century onwards a number of continental stories dealing in a more or less pornographic way with love in a convent also introduce the more serious theme of incarceration. Diderot's *La Religieuse* is probably the best known; and one of the most striking works of romantic Germany, the *Nachtwachen von Bonaventura* explores the sexual possibilities of a madhouse and shows us a nun buried alive for having given birth to a child. The Marquis de Sade in *Justine* installs a flock of viciously dissolute monks in palatial apartments beneath the sanctuary, and with them their female slaves. In England, despite the scarcity of material for firsthand observation, *The Monk* (admittedly French-inspired) at least equals its continental counterparts in *exposé* and incarceration, if it does not outdo them. And like mid-century European fiction, *The Monk* extends the meaning of its symbols of incarceration, adding isolation, fantasy, and incest to the themes of restraint, passion, and death that mark the Augustan madhouses and whorehouses.

In its convents and dungeons, for example, *The Monk* shows us what the Age of Reason seems never to have doubted, the disastrous consequences of incarceration when it is understood as isolation from society. The wretched mother whom Lorenzo discovers in *The Monk* has been "plunged into a private dungeon, expressly constituted to hide from the world for ever the victim of cruelty and tyrannic superstition. In this dreadful abode she was to lead a perpetual solitude, deprived of all society, and believed to be dead, by those, whom affection might have prompted to attempt her rescue." Even without dungeons the meaning of convents or monasteries is really alienation from society. Modern readers share instinctively the anguish of characters like those in *La Religieuse* or *Melmoth the Wanderer* who work desperately to escape from their convents, not to do or see something in particular, but simply to be a part of the ordinary social world. A universal human instinct, intensified by cultural values, drives these prisoners of forced vows out of their solitude and into tumultuous public life. But there is another side to the consequences of solitude. If solitude deprives these characters of society, it also frees them to enact their most secret fantasies.

The monastery, for example, first releases and then frustrates the lust of Ambrosio, the remarkable villain of *The Monk*. To the outside world he seems the most devout and self-disciplined monk in all of

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Spain, a holy man of ice; but when the nun Matilda seduces him, he embarks on a spectacular career of clandestine vice, one that leads him finally to the virginal, Clarissa-like figure of Antonia. Held in check by the threat of exposure and public disgrace, he threatens to explode his narrow, confining cell:

> With the direst imprecations he vowed vengeance against her: he swore that, cost that it would, he still would possess Antonia. Starting from the bed, he paced the chamber with disordered steps, howled with impotent fury, dashed himself violently against the walls, and indulged all the transports of rage and madness.

Throughout these novels of religious incarceration, libidinous nuns and monks attempt to break free like Ambrosio into unrestrained sexuality, urged to it by their liberating isolation. The "Blooding Nun" of *The Monk* is one extravagant case; the monk Medarus in E. T. A. Hoffman's *Die Elixier des Teufels*, another.

Yet it is not simply sexual activity that the buried, unreasoning life of convents reveals. In these hidden worlds the ordinary family outside their walls becomes the target of the energies generated within. In *La Religieuse* a cruel and inaccessible father thrusts his illegitimate daughter, Suzanne, away from his family and into conventual exile, while two other daughters enjoy his love (and perhaps as important, his money). In *Melmoth the Wanderer* the young Moncada is forced to enter a monastery by his father (actually by two fathers: his real one and the cruel family-confessor "father"); his younger brother, however, basks in parental favor; and in an hysterical interview Moncada's mother rejects his appeal to her, disclosing his illegitimate birth. Moncada thus becomes a sacrificial victim for his father's lust and his mother's sexuality. (An unnamed monk later leads Moncada down into a symbolic underworld in a doomed attempt to escape; he there reveals himself to be a parricide who has earlier entrapped his sister and her lover in these same passages and watched them starve to death.) In *The Monk* we again meet an Oedipal pattern, where Ambrosio kills his mother but rapes the surrogate, his sister. And Chateaubriand's *René* shows us a sister stretched out upon a funeral slab—part of her entrance ceremony into the convent—confessing her love for her brother. Clearly these Oedipal configurations, not present in earlier fictions of madhouses and brothels, shock us with the power of unreason and even justify the confinement that makes them possible. But two further points should be noticed here. The first is how often the incarcerating house is destroyed by these incestuous children:

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Suzanne dreams of setting fire to her convent; Ambrosio is responsible for a mob's destruction of a convent and the slaughter of its nuns; and Moncada, in the most terrifying episode of all, brings down the palace of the Inquisition in fire. The second point to be noticed is the meaning of incest in these contexts.

All the shattered and smoking convents of the Gothic novel prove to us the power of unreason to destroy its prisons, if it can break free or if the keeper lingers in their dark passages. The recurring theme of incest in these novels also conveys to us the destructive power of unreason, its ability to tear apart the central institution of order and stability in a public society, the family. The eighteenth-century fear of madness and of the unreasoning sexuality of women springs from just these fantasies of explosion and escape. And yet there is another side to such destruction. One possible reading of the Gothic novel is to see foreshadowed in it the overthrow of wicked institutions and the coming of Revolution. If incest threatens the family structure, it also expresses a powerful drive to overcome the divisive duality of the Augustan view of human nature, a powerful drive to reintegrate the human personality, to unify it as we see dimly in Byron and Shelley. And if the burning Inquisition represents the destruction of ordering institutions, it also represents the collapse of needlessly repressive ones. *Clarissa,* which is in part a novel about the destruction of a family, opposes a decent middle-class morality to the aristocratic tyranny of Lovelace. By no accident does Sir Launcelot Greaves, locked in a private madhouse, compare it to the Inquisition and the Bastille. In this context the Marquis de Sade may seem to us less of an outlaw, more nearly a part of a long-standing dissent against Enlightenment humanism. Thus in *Justine* he sounds with shattering irony the themes we have been considering. Justine is the embodiment of reason, and yet everyone regards her as mad; unreason has captured society, the inmates run the asylum; Justine herself is jailed (like Clarissa) for theft—like Clarissa she refuses to earn her money—and the prison that holds her is destroyed by fire, while her liberty becomes paradoxically a never-ending series of incarcerations. Duality is still present, of course, in de Sade: Justine's cellmate arranges the fire; her sister Juliette pursues the opposite career of rational vice. But the revolutionary impulse is unmistakable, and the book scars our consciousness profoundly.

We have only to shift our perspective slightly to feel how the fate of incarceration runs through eighteenth-century literature, through works and writers far greater than those we have been naming, greater

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even than *Clarissa*. The opening voyage of *Gulliver's Travels*, to take one instance, presents a moment of extraordinary tension. Who can forget Gulliver tied down by the Lilliputians, restrained by their hundreds of ropes and stakes, yet capable, if he chooses, of immense violence and destruction? Will he rise up, bursting the bonds and scattering his captors? The ropes that hold Gulliver down are metaphorical as well as real, all the ties of social responsibility and decency, societal chains. But this image of potential violence restrained is clearly related to that of incarceration, and also to that pervasive Augustan image of chains and padlocks that appears so dramatically from Johnson to Blake. And indeed Blake's poetry is suffused with moments of entombment or imprisonment like those we have seen. But the difference is one of radical emphasis: the novel of incarceration is interested in the locking away of the irrational heroine, and it nearly always fails to render an effective picture of life after release. The artifacts of urbanity, the gates and bars and restraining walls of the Augustan setting, are soon to be forsaken, replaced by the forests and fields of a nature presumed free. That the trees of a forest may also grow into walls, into "shades of the prison house," would be considered in the fullness of time. But as the Gothic convents burst into flame, Blake and the next generation celebrate the releasing, the moment when the chains are broken and the energy of life blazes forth from its prison like the sun, or like Persephone.

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BOOKS

THE END OF CULTURE

THE CULTURAL CONTRADICTIONS OF CAPITALISM. By Daniel Bell. Basic Books. $12.95.

Having predicted accurately the end of ideology some years ago, Daniel Bell now proceeds to announce the end of culture in his new book, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism.* Of course, as even Bell has admitted recently, by the end of ideology he meant only radical ideology. Similarly, the end of culture for Bell means the end of radical, or modernist, or avant-garde culture—terms which he uses rather loosely and more or less interchangeably.

It is not easy to summarize Bell's argument, for it is quite sprawling and full of digressions, contradictions, and quotations whose relevance is not always immediately apparent. He tries to cover so much ground—art, literature, politics, economics, history—with so many theories and so many facts, that one feels he is surveying what is happening on this planet from a distant satellite, and that one has to put everything into a computer to unscramble it. So far as I can make out on my own, however, Bell's line seems to be that we are in an era of technological growth and cultural decline, a disparity he describes as a "cultural contradiction of capitalism." What Bell means by cultural decline is somewhat ambiguous, however, for sometimes he seems to be talking about the failure of the entire culture, in almost an anthropological sense, though most of the time he is excoriating that part of the culture that is customarily thought of as the advanced or serious sector. His complaint about the culture as a whole appears to be that it has been softened up by the modernist and avant-garde movements to the point where it is over-eager to assimilate them. But this part of his argument depends on a reduction of modern art and criticism to a purely antibourgeois, alienated, shock-producing, unrestrained, erotic mode of self-indulgence—in other words, he has reduced modern art to its most extreme and least appealing expressions. And this permits him to make the standard conservative argument against modern art, blaming it for the cheap imitations fostered by the mass and commercial media.

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As for modern art itself, Bell claims the trouble started with the modernist impulse, which contained the seeds of our cultural debasement today. The list of its sins is a long one: modernism was in a false adversary relation to bourgeois society, without being sufficiently political; modernism eulogized the self; it wallowed in hedonism; it broke down all limits to self-expression, particularly in matters of sex and eroticism; it was antirational, nihilistic, and formless; it failed to maintain its own elitist standards by cultivating the "tradition of the new," which transformed the work of art into a process; it replaced control of the medium with the idea of authenticity of experience; it "eclipsed" distance in space and time; it eroded the Protestant work ethic, and elevated the principles of play and pleasure; it tended to erase the "boundary between life and art"; it celebrated the demonic; it paid homage to madness. Of course, anyone familiar with cultural history will immediately recognize the common litany of conservative complaints against modernism, going back to Irving Babbit and Paul Elmer More, which Bell sums up as the esthetics of shock and sensation. But Bell makes the scene even gloomier by arguing both ways: by blaming modernism and the avant-garde for the low state of the culture and then turning around and bemoaning their death. Thus not only is traditional culture buried, though it is not really clear just what traditional culture is as distinct from modernism, but now we also learn that the decadent culture that killed it is no longer with us. Nor is it clear what has taken its place, though Bell seems to imply that some kind of universal pop, a mixture of lowbrow and middlebrow, fortified with the adversary postures of the old avant-garde, has taken over on all levels of the culture.

As I have been suggesting, it is difficult to deal with Bell's ideas about the art and the culture. He is an intelligent and learned man, but he writes like an outsider, in breathless Spenglerian categories at once too broad and too narrow, lacking the feel for the medium and the texture of a work that artists and good critics have, and unable, therefore, to make the proper modulations, distinctions, or connections. He rushes from one generalization to the next, as though the specific quality of a work or its critical resonance did not matter. And though he refers to various critics, the tone of his writing does not indicate an acquaintance with the range or subtlety of recent criticism. Let me give some examples. At one point, Bell says

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> The sensibility of the fifties was largely a literary one. In the writings of such representative critics as Lionel Trilling, Yvor Winters, and John Crow Ransom, the emphasis was on complexity, irony, ambiguity, and paradox. These are properties peculiar to the mind. They foster a critical attitude, a detachment and distance which guard one against any overwhelming involvement, absorption, immolation in a creed or an experience. At worst a form of quietism, at best a mode of self-consciousness, this attitude is essentially moderate in tone. The sensibility of the sixties rejected that mood in savage, even mindless fashion. In its fury with the times, the new sensibility was loud, imprecatory, prone to obscenity, and given to posing every issue, political or otherwise, in disjunctive correlatives.

Now, aside from its evident bias for the tepid and the respectable, this passage illustrates the kind of distortion that comes from over-generalizing and lumping together things that have only the remotest connection with each other. To begin with, Trilling, Winters, and Ransom had very little in common: Trilling was a historical and social critic, Winters a moralist, and Ransom the father of the new criticism, which tried to make a theory of poetry out of the principles of irony, paradox, and ambiguity, in keeping with a return to the sensibility of the seventeenth century. Second, the implication that detachment from involvement and experience is a mark of high art has more to do with the esthetics of the genteel tradition than with the making of fiction and poetry. One has only to think of Robert Lowell, who, by the way, was admired by most of the new critics. Furthermore, the characterization of the sixties as an incoherent and vulgar babel mixes up the worst part of the counter-culture and pop-art, with the serious poetry, fiction and criticism of the period, which had none of the distasteful qualities Bell associates with an ignorant and noisy rabble. I must say that one simply does not recognize the novels, poems and criticism of the period in these dismissive and sweeping generalizations. In addition, Bell accuses the sixties of a "concern with violence and cruelty; a preoccupation with the sexually perverse; a desire to make noise; an anticognitive and antiintellectual mood; an effort once and for all to erase the boundary between 'art' and 'life'; and a fusion of art and politics." Again, this is polemical fantasy. Violence and cruelty were to be found mostly at the extremities and in the packaged versions of contemporary art for mass consumption; they were not the main concern of much of the serious fiction and poetry. And the so-called anticognitive and antiintellectual mood was a staple of romanticism—perhaps of all

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art—and the seemingly greater emphasis on the nonrational component of art was connected with the reaction against the classical sensibility of T.S. Eliot and the New Critics. One has only to read critics like Harold Bloom and Geoffrey Hartman to recognize that the current revival of romanticism is not the raucous political phenomenon Bell makes it out to be. Finally, a careful reader will note that after criticizing the culture of the sixties for not being political, he reverses himself when he says the "hallmark of the sixties was a political and cultural radicalism."

A few more random examples of a method that can lead only to a kind of high-minded confusion. Bell appears to misunderstand Susan Sontag's strictures against interpretation, taking them to mean a condemnation of criticism, instead of a condemnation of the kind of criticism that translated works into the fashionable modes of intellectual consumption. Similarly, Bell mistakes environmental sculpture, which tries to close the gap between art and architecture, for something he calls "eclipse of distance," which according to Bell, is a sign of esthetic decline because it narrows the distance between a work and its audience. Here, again, Bell writes as though literary history did not exist, as though, for example, Greek poems or plays, or medieval morality plays, were not closer to their audiences than those today are. And Bell speaks of the formlessness of contemporary fiction, as though it were simply a rendezvous with chaos, and not a different idea of form, an idea of form based on the unity of experience rather than the chronology of narrative, which, incidentally, was not a universal but was grounded in the conventions of the story-teller and in older notions of reality and causality in human relations. The break between modern fiction and that of the nineteenth century is not in the idea of the self, or violence, or sexual freedom—in any of Bell's nihilist or liberating categories—but in the shift to a more complex view of reality, a shift, that is, from a linear naturalism to a vertical structure of experience. Reality is no longer thought to be something simply observable and logical, something out there waiting to be imitated by art; it is now conceived to be a construction which conveys the sense not the look of existence.

But Bell's thesis raises even larger questions about the relation of art and culture to the society. As I have said, he suggests throughout that the disease of modernism destroyed some healthy body of traditional culture, but nowhere is that mythically normal culture defined or located. The truth is, as I have suggested, that such a past exists only in the retroactive fantasies of conservative critics who condemn the

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current scene from the point of view of some ideal esthetics of law and order. It is the good old times of aging moralists, that, like most nostalgic versions of history, never existed. If one were to look for the seeds of our contemporary sensibility, one would immediately find oneself in the middle of the nineteenth century and gradually work oneself back at least to the Renaissance. But an even more important question posed by Bell's argument is the source of what he conceives to be our cultural decline. Here Bell's failure to distinguish between the commercial and popular culture on one side and the serious culture on the other makes him an unwitting ally of those who find it profitable to blur the distinctions. It is no secret that the commercial culture has been exploiting the more chic aspects of modernism to feed the growing cultural market, but despite Bell's lengthy denunciations of the pop scene he plays down the role of the media in creating a taste for novelty. And it is also no secret that some of the seemingly serious strains in the arts today have been affected by the seductions of the marketplace—more in fiction and painting, less in poetry. Nevertheless a good deal of fiction and poetry has resisted these pressures, sometimes to the point of becoming too internalized and esoteric. And Bell's blindness to the efforts of a wide range of talent sounds like the age-old disapproval by an older, conservative generation of a new scene. Thus, when Bell disposes of the nihilism and formlessness of current fiction—by which he apparently means writers like Pynchon, Heller, Barthelme—one gets no sense of the power of these novelists, or of the fact that for the most part they do not try to satisfy the popular demand for easy and sensational solutions. And it is not, as Bell implies, because of a love of disorder, that their work reflects the organized absurdities of modern life.

In the end, what does all this talk about moral and cultural chaos mean. Bell has a long disquisition on the transformation of needs into wants in a capitalist economy, presumably leading to the creation of a consumer culture. But it does not seem to have occurred to Bell that it is the consumer society and not the modern tradition that is responsible for the boom in pop and chic. And it is hard to escape the conclusion that one is dealing in this book not with the contradictions of capitalism, but with Bell's own contradictions.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS

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TWO POETS

SLEEPERS JOINING HANDS. By Robert Bly. Harper and Row. $5.95.

THE AVENUE BEARING THE INITIALS OF CHRIST INTO THE NEW WORLD. By Galway Kinnell. Houghton Mifflin. $2.95.

THE BOOK OF NIGHTMARES. By Galway Kinnell. Houghton Mifflin. $4.50.

The experience of reading *Sleepers Joining Hands,* Robert Bly's first large-press book since his National Book Award winning *The Light Around The Body,* is a bit like slogging your way through a violent storm.

The book begins in deceptive calm, with "Six Winter Privacy Poems":

> 6
>
> When I woke, new snow had fallen.
> I am alone, yet someone else is with me,
> drinking coffee, looking out at the snow.

Bly's central theme, beautifully rendered: the duality of inner and outer worlds, the deep duality of a consciousness often conflicted but existing here in a momentary state of peaceful coexistence. It's the American haiku, fully and quietly accomplished. Compare that with a section from the final poem in the book, "An Extra Joyful Chorus for Those Who Have Read This Far":

> I am a thorn enduring in the dark sky,
> I am the one whom I have never met,
> I am a swift fish shooting through the troubled waters,
> I am the last inheritor crying out in deserted houses
> I am the salmon hidden in the pool on the temple floor
> I am what remains of the beloved
> I am an insect with black enamel knees hugging the
> curve of insanity
> I am the evening light rising from the ocean plains
> I am an eternal happiness fighting in the long reeds.

The distance between that initial, reposeful "I am alone" and the final, frenetic Whitmanesque catalogue of wildly various identifications should give you some idea of the bumpy ground Bly travels in *Sleepers Joining Hands.*

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Bly's troubled yearning to achieve the condition of a Whitman most shows in passages of "The Night Journey in the Cooking Pot":

> I see the road ahead,
> and my body cries out, and leaps into the air,
> and throws itself on the floor, knocking over the chairs.
> I think I am the body,
> the body rushes in and ties me up,
> and then goes through the house....
>
> . . . . . .
>
> I am ashamed looking at the fish in the water.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Suddenly I am those who run large railroads at dusk,
> who stand around the fallen beast howling,
> who cannot get free,
> the man the lion bounding catches in the African grass.
>
> I decide that death is friendly.
> Finally death seeps up through the tiniest capillaries
> of my toes.
>
> I fall into my own hands,
> fences break down under horses,
> cities starve, whole towns of singing women carrying
> to the burial fields
> the look I saw on my father's face,
> I sit down again, I hit my own body,
> I shout at myself, I see what I have betrayed.
> What I have written is not good enough.
> Who does it help?
> I am ashamed sitting on the edge of my bed.

Whitman's influence is everywhere: in the image of the road, in that tenth round mind-body tussle in the first stanza, in lines like "I am ashamed looking at..." and "Suddenly I am those who...," and especially in the facile announcement "I decide that death is friendly." But Whitman was not, so far as I can recall, ever ashamed sitting on the edge of his bed, nor did he ever announce a decision in his poetry that "death is friendly." For Whitman, death was a fact of his condition, not a subject for debate. Whitman's belief became the condition of his poetry, not the occasion for it.

No, "this is not the perfect freedom of the saints" for it lacks the saint's bedrock of belief; the result is a poetry of claim instead of conviction:

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I am not going farther from you,
I am coming nearer,
green rain carries me nearer you,
I weave drunkenly about the page,
I love you,
I never knew that I loved you
until I was swallowed by the invisible,
my black shoes evaporating, rising about my head...
("The Night Journey")

Bly's insistence is proof of his failure: these lines require translation into "I *hope* I am not going farther....I *want* to come nearer....I *want* to love you." And these translations reduce to "I want to establish community." But can a writer establish community with his readers through a passage like the following?

All those men who cannot find the road,
who die coughing particles of black flesh onto
neighboring roofs.
Nailheads that have been brooding on Burton's
Melancholy under Baltimore rowhouses
roll out in the street, underneath tires,
and catch the Secretary of State
as he goes off to threaten the premiers of
underdeveloped nations.
("Hair")

What exists here of a kind of prose statement is available to the community (the Secretary of State is an evil man); what exists as poetry is virtually unintelligible because of its privacy of meaning.

How difficult it must be to cultivate this special brand of solitary sensibility ("inwardness, inwardness, inwardness,/the inward path I still walk on") and still hope for the kind of reader community Bly writes about, in this book but especially in his criticism. He's accomplished this job in the past, it's true—by shunting between inner and outer worlds, writing "private" poems of quiet, mystical meditation on the one hand and "public" poems of scathing political and psychological analysis on the other. *Sleepers Joining Hands* is an attempt to come to terms with the inner/outer dichotomy, to integrate them or at least to lead them toward integration. But the attempt mostly fails, since the self Bly would integrate is so admittedly disintegrated:

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In the marshes the mysterious mother calls to her moor-
bound chicks.
I love the mother.
I am an enemy of the Mother, give me my sword.
I leap into her mouth full of seaweed.
("An Extra Joyful Chorus")

There is however one calm, searching eye in the midst of this storm. The prose center of the book, "I Came Out of the Mother Naked," explores the arguments of Bachofen, Newmann, and Jung that matriarchies only gradually gave way to partiarchies, and that "the Great Mother can best be understood as a union of four 'force fields.'" In working through his exciting "psychic archaeology," Bly achieves with his prose what he hopes for in his poetry: establishment of community created through an imaginative reading of the history of his own consciousness and the culture in which it lives, works, suffers, and sometimes exults. The essay focuses the energies dispersed throughout the poetry; it also provides Bly with a possible mythology. But it is as archeologists in search of a community that we finally come to read the poetry, discovering here a flying turtle, there a cooking pot, picking our way slowly through a littered maze of Jungian psychology and Great Mother imagery, backwards in the order of literature down to the foundation of Bly's theory which gives us the clues we need to reconstruct the poems. Though he will hate the comparison, Bly's latest poetry is written like almost all of Ransom's, in the service of a theory.

Says Valéry, "...there is no theory that is not a fragment, carefully prepared, of some autobiography." Bly has given us a lot of his autobiography, including these rearranged quotations from his column in the first 1974 issue of the *American Poetry Review:*

> For my own generation of poets the whole problem of the community has been an agony....When I publish a book....I try to give something to the community....the more the weak function in the writer is developed, the closer the writer comes to the community, or to "humanity."....my weakest function, feeling, is still poorly developed....

It follows that if Bly is to develop what, in his view, is his weakest function, thereby resolving his agony of the community, he should

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write fragmented poems full of feeling. That's just what he's done in the past, giving us poems of intense feeling in which discreetly marked fragments sit comfortably together, held by the power of his extraordinary imagery. But in *Sleepers Joining Hands* things fall apart because the center, the essay, cannot hold the poetry:

> I have sat here alone for two hours....
> I have sat here alone for two years!
> There is another being living inside me.
> He is looking out of my eyes.
> I hear him
> in the wind through the bare trees.
>
> I met the King coming through the traffic.
> He said, I shall give to you more pain than wounds at sea.
>
> That is why I am so glad in fall.
> I walk out, throw my arms up, and am glad.
> ("Water Drawn Up Into the Head")

I'm glad Bly is glad; but I nevertheless want to agree with him when he says that "What I have written is not enough," and to ask with him "Who does it help?"

Robert Bly, I imagine. Although my quotations can't represent the full scope of *Sleepers Joining Hands*, they nevertheless mark the essential shift in Bly's recent poetry, as distinct from his prose—a turn from charting and chanting the geography of America's psychological and moral landscape, to mapping and mourning the battered terrain of his own fragmented sensibility. And coincident with this development, from having been our critic who most successfully demolished the confessional mode, he's recently opted for it himself: "O yes, I love you, book of my confessions." Insofar as that "book of confessions" is synonymous with his latest actual book, Bly's performance is sloppy and self-conscious, as if he could suddenly hear himself thinking, and out loud at that.

With *The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Christ into the New World* and *The Book of Nightmares* we have a clear view of Galway Kinnell's work from the beginning to the present; what's immediately apparent is that the work, although occasionally excellent, is very uneven.

The Avenue contains Kinnell's first three books. *First Poems 1946–54* is the juvenilia its title augurs; except for a couple first-rate

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poems ("Indian Bread," "Walking Out Alone in Dead of Winter"), it's most remarkable for the unassimilated debts Kinnell incurs (Whitman, Frost, Williams, Eliot, Yeats, Roethke) and for the annunciation of an attitude which will become the major theme of his later poetry:

> Most men have not seen the world divide,
> Or seen, it did not open wide,
> Or wide, they clung to the safer side.
> But I have felt the sundering like a blade.
> ("Conversation at Tea")

In *What a Kingdom It Was* (1960) Kinnell pays off some of his debts; in *Flower Herding on Mount Monadnock* (1964) he's in the black, writing his own good poetry, especially in Part II of that book. And he's also aware of the postures and the limits of vision in his earlier work:

> I can support it no longer.
> Laughing ruefully at myself
> For all I claim to have suffered
> I get up. Damned nightmarer!
>
> It is New Hampshire out here,
> It is nearly the dawn.
> The song of the whippoorwill stops
> And the dimension of depth seizes everything.
> ("Flower Herding on Mount Monadnock")

Kinnell's principal posture is that of representative post-Christian existential sufferer, but in *Flower Herding* the posture often becomes a calmly stated conviction: "I know I live half alive in the world,/ I know half my life belongs to the wild darkness."

The Book of Nightmares explores that half of Kinnell's life which "belongs to the wild darkness." A single ambling meditation organized on the model of the *Duino Elegies* (ten long poems which in this version are divided into seven parts each), the book allows Kinnell to examine a variety of nightmares: the immanence of death, love's difficulties, the tortures of memory and doubt, the omnipresence of fear, etc. Kinnell's ambitions are clearly metaphysical.

The challenge of the book comes from the epigraph, the conclusion of Rilke's *Fourth Elegy:*

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> But this, though: death,
> the whole of death,—even before life's begun,
> to hold it all so gently, and be good:
> this is beyond description!

Rilke is speaking here of his inability to describe the child's original grace, its unconsciousness of the death that grows within even as it grows. Kinnell revises Rilke's focus, staking claim to "the whole of death" as perceived by the adult who looks to his children with an agonized presentiment of their future.

When Kinnell is in fact looking to his children, speaking about or to the Maud and Fergus to whom the book is dedicated, his writing is often superb. To Maud:

> In the light the moon
> sends back, I can see in your eyes
>
> the hand that waved once
> in my father's eyes, a tiny kite
> wobbling far up in the twilight of his last look:
>
> and the angel
> of all mortal things lets go the string.
>
> 7.
>
> Back you go, into your crib.
>
> The last blackbird lights up his gold wings: farewell.
> Your eyes close inside your head,
> in sleep. Already
> in your dreams the hours begin to sing.
>
> Little sleep's-head sprouting hair in the moonlight,
> when I come back
> we will go out together,
> we will walk out together among
> the ten thousand things,
> each scratched too late with such knowledge, *the wages*
> *of dying is love.*

The image of the eyes is explored with deftness and surprise, then wonderfully, gently led over into the seventh section to fine effect. The lovely ambling gait of section seven permits the beautiful simplicity of "in your dreams the hours begin to sing." "*The wages of dying is love*"

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is one of Kinnell's revised borrowings, and they don't bear much scrutiny. But all in all, the passage works well and to good effect.

When Kinnell's gaze wanders to the cosmos, however, he stumbles through a maze of muddled metaphysics: speculating on the nature of love, he opines:

> And yet I think
> it must be the wound, the wound itself,
> which lets us know and love,
> which forces us to reach out to our misfit
> and by a kind
> of poetry of the soul, accomplish,
> for a moment, the wholeness the drunk Greek
> extrapolated from his high
> or flagellated out of an empty heart,
>
> that purest,
> most tragic concumbence, strangers
> clasped into one, a moment, of their moment on earth.

"A kind of poetry of the soul"? Aristophanes drunk? extrapolating or flagellating (out of an empty heart?) a wholeness comprised of misfits? And considering that the passage starts with the assumption there is some virtue in being let "know and love," doesn't that "purest, most tragic concumbence" leave us a bit in the dark?

But then Kinnell's vision is dark. His book, after all, is *The Book of Nightmares*, and it carries a large freight of sorrow and despair, a psychological map of experience plotted by the profoundly pessimistic Freud of *Civilization and its Discontents*, a grisly view of a life from which

> .....when you rise—
> if you do rise—it will be in the sothic year
> made of the raised salvages
> of the fragments all unaccomplished
> of years past, scraps
> and jettisons of time mortality
> could not grind down into his meal of blood and laughter.

The image was first and more finely drawn by Goya, in *Disasters of War* but especially in his late Black Paintings such as "Saturn Devouring His Children." Kinnell's cosmic ambitions threaten to devour his. In choosing to view only half his life, then writing a book in which he treats the whole of it, he willfully twists the shape of some of his experience, then some of his poetry.

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The vagueness of the passages I just quoted (and the dictionary English accompanying it) runs through much of the book. Rhythms are sometimes awkward, lines being arranged on the principle of keeping adjectives away from nouns, nouns from verbs—a capricious kind of syntactic rhyme which jerks us through the poetry:

> A round-
> cheeked girlchild comes awake
> in her crib. The green
> swaddlings tear open,
> a filament or vestment
> tears, the blue
> flower opens.

Kinnell freely invents new symbols while ignoring the customary attributions of old ones (the apostle Peter becomes "he who crushed with his heel the brain out of the snake."). And when the cosmic yearning is most upon him, he reverts to his early habit of imitation: Book VI is modelled on Villon's *Testament*; an early description of mystical experience, on Whitman's famous passage in "Song of Myself." Kinnell suffers by both comparisons.

Taking into account these faults then, what does Kinnell's ledger look like on the basis of *The Book of Nightmares*? I think he's still, but barely, in the black. Since long poems invite failures, the central question is does the book hold together, does it work as an ensemble? For me it does. Though I'm annoyed by Kinnell's occasional poses and presumptions and his confused poetics, the best parts of his book continue to draw me in, persuading me over and over to participate in the nightmare of a possible, fully imagined and carefully registered fate:

> We who live out our plain lives, who put
> our hand into the hand of whatever we love
> as it vanishes,
> as we vanish,
> and stumble toward what will be, simply by arriving,
> a kind of fate,
>
> some field, maybe, of flaked stone
> scattered in starlight
> where the flesh
> swaddles its skeleton a last time
> before the bones go their way without us,

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might we not hear, even then,
the bear call
from his hillside—a call, like ours, needing
to be answered—and the dam-bear
call back across the darkness
of the valley of not-knowing
the only word tongues shape without intercession,

yes...yes...?

Yes. Unable to "Drink and be whole again, beyond confusion," Kinnell's willed choice and his one necessity are to explore the confusion of a life beyond salvation, a death beyond redemption. The result is often compelling reading. Now that he has wandered among the darkest and worst his life holds, it should be exciting, given the quality of his best work, to see how he joins his nightmare vision with the other half of his life.

ALAN HELMS

LAW AND DISORDER

SURVEILLER ET PUNIR: NAISSANCE DE LA PRISON. By Michel Foucault. Editions Gallimard.

It may not be accidental that the trial of Patricia Hearst, an "unemployed urban guerilla," as she characterized herself, overshadowed such consequential events as the Shorr investigation or the Lebanese civil war. For Michel Foucault, this spectacle about mental illness and crime would be a recent manifestation of our customary fascination with deviance. In fact all his works about the mad, the sick, the criminal or the homosexual, show how the very presence of deviants always has helped to maintain the power of the elite—along with social solidarity. Thus Ms. Hearst's entourage of flamboyant lawyers and psychiatrists who were to prove that she had been "brainwashed" or "coercively persuaded," and the jury's final verdict, not only allowed for the customary generalizations and clichés about crime

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and punishment, destiny and luck, rich and poor, but turned Patricia Hearst into a symbol—a symbol to judge, to identify with, and to reconfirm one's prejudices. And even if, to some of us, it all appeared a bit too pat, or too simplistic, there was enough suspense, media coverage, merchandizing of ideas and ideals, to sustain our interest.

In France, where everything now is analyzed in neo-structuralist fashion, Foucault—the current superstar who made his reputation by looking at all sorts of deviants since the Middle Ages—would be asked to comment for the press. And his comments would, in turn, make headlines. For him, Patricia Hearst would become a moment in history that occurred as a result of myriads of past and contemporary events—events that had their roots in a number of specific conscious and unconscious knowledges. And for him, Ms. Hearst would be more than a symbol: her presence in the witness stand would be contrasted to someone like Damien, her 1757 counterpart, whose condemnation opens *Surveiller et punir.*

In this book, Foucault not only looks at crime and punishment in the way he previously analyzed madness and disease, but links them to the entire society. Once more, he follows Bachelard, for whom the birth of a new science signifies an epistemological break; but he goes beyond him by examining the epochs that are delimited by these breaks, in neo-Saussurean manner. The most recent break, states Foucault, took place around 1825, with the beginning of our own scientific era. Until then, he says, we punished the bodies of deviants, but now we punish their souls. Had Ms. Hearst lived two-hundred years ago, her punishment might have resembled that of Damien, who

> . . . in order to make amends . . . was led naked, in a dung-cart, wearing only his shirt, holding a burning two-pound candle, and then was to be strapped to the scaffold while still in this cart; the straps were to be tied around the breasts, arms, thighs and fat of the legs, while his right hand was to hold up the knife with which he had committed the parricide; and on the places where he was strapped, boiling oil from the melted lead of the bullet was to be poured from the burning sulphur fire, until the burning skin, the candle wax, and the sulphur would melt together; his body was then to be dismembered and was to be pulled by four horses; and after that it was to be consumed by fire, reduced to ashes and the ashes were to be thrown to the wind.

Almost gleefully, Foucault recounts this ghoulish tale, the way Lévi-Strauss recounts myths, through parallels and transformations, signs and signifiers, synchronic and diachronic oppositions. Using Patricia Hearst as an example, he might contrast her to Damien in the

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way she dressed and moved. And he might show how her punishment was mental rather than physical. Already in *Madness and Civilization* (1961), where he pointed to the connections between crime and insanity, he indicated how through guilt, the masses could be managed—in school, hospital, army and factory. Now, he focuses on crime as a social bond, on its link to madness, and on lawyers and psychiatrists, on prisons and incarceration, in his quest for "visible" and "invisible" structures of knowledge that relate them all—in a system that produces the criminals it needs.

Actually, both *Surveiller et punir* and *I, Pierre Riviere, having killed my mother, my sister, and my brother...*, only sharpen and expand his previous themes, although they deal with a new subject. These works provide the theoretical practice he suggested in *The Order of Things* and in *The Archeology of Knowledge*, where he "demonstrated" how codes of knowledge can be unveiled, or discovered. Now he applies this "quadri-lateral of language," as he discusses the "archives" of crime and punishment against the "horizon" supplied for his "archeology." But because all the archives interact with each other, he talks about economic, biological or legal productions as well—they're all said to have originated from the new egalitarianism after the French revolution. And since equal and impersonal punishment had to be developed, Foucault looks at the effects of punishment as a complex social function, at chastisement as a political tactic and at the new "technology of power" as a form of manipulation to discourage crime, and which is expected to provide a source of free labor.

Because power, argues Foucault, depends on knowledge and on the restriction of this knowledge, that is on secrecy, lawyers and judges construct systems of punishment and of justice that incorporate medical and psychiatric expertise. This allows them, increasingly, to hide behind therapeutic and "humane" verdicts that produce delinquency, but that also take them off the hook. Foucault would perceive Patricia Hearst's trial as an example of the legal reconstitution of a crime, that, in typical fashion, induced her to confess, "spontaneously," so that the evidence would reconfirm our legal code, and, ultimately, medical and legal power would become even stronger. This power is contrasted to former omnipotent and arbitrary rulers, because it pretends to be even-handed. But it has its own ubiquitous consequences. Thus Foucault notes that the people are now more united against murderers, but are also more ambivalent about thieves and robbers. He links this, among other things, to the dislike of the new and rising class of inspectors, and to the fascination with murder in

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popular lyrics—lyrics that glorify the criminal who, posthumously, expiates his sins. Still, he doesn't treat these facts in the customary causal, historical fashion: they're productions of knowledge—knowledge that Foucault undercuts and rearranges.

It is impossible to describe his versatility, the richness of his mental gymnastics, or the abstruseness of his presentation, in a short review. He jumps from economic productions to productions of crime and delinquency, from personalized old-style executions to modern electric chairs, from the art of punishment to the technology of representation, from the economy of pain to the expiation of crime through work, and from Philadelphia's Walnut Street prison to the allocation of space and time inside all prisons. And he talks of the substitution and the decomposition of space and time, of hierarchic surveillance in "cellular" prisons—an invention Tocqueville brought back from America. Everything is grist for his mill of knowledge, in our scientific and rational "era of man." For Foucault perceives crime and its management as corollaries of modern economic production, whose adjuncts are coercion, docility and regimentation that turn people into cases.

In such a society, says Foucault, the deviant is singled out, so that the celebration of Patricia Hearst's trial serves to hide the disciplinary society with its centralized police force under the guise of equal treatment and rational authority. When, for example, he relates the organization of prostitutes (from their health inspection, to houses, to "regulated" passages through prisons) to financial profit from illicit sexual pleasure that is funnelled back into society, when he illustrates how morals were lost as moralization increased, or when he shows how the delinquent milieu was in complicity with puritanism in profiting from repressed sexuality only to "recover" that profit later on, then he is at his best. Political expediency, bourgeois pretension and power itself, he concludes, confuse the art of rectifying with the right to punish, and allow power-hungry judges to hand down "therapeutic" sentences that help to perpetuate the norms of corrupt power along with the crimes.

Foucault's devastating indictment of this power, I believe, is the strongest argument in favor of all his books. This is the theme that emerges in the end, after all the philosophical trimmings and the criss-crossing intellectualizations have been peeled off. Yet the "peels" themselves provide many insights. Of course, Foucault's very refusal to stick to a single discipline, his insistence on including everything, makes not only for the plausibility and range of his project, but also for

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our scepticism. At times, he sounds like a systematized Orwell, or a modernized Marx. That's because his system, like his mind, is a catch-all, a sponge that absorbs whatever it comes in contact with, only to inflate his theory. And although no one believes that his codes of knowledge will surface any more than Lévi-Strauss's structures of myth, his free associations promise to help explain the "human condition." Yet, he also shows that the entrenched powers of our "rational" society won't be dislodged by the masses who delude themselves into thinking they're free; nor does he believe that these powers can maintain themselves. And Marxist society, a different sort of police state, never represented a solution for him. Hence, Marxists accuse him (correctly) of missing a class viewpoint, while philosophers, scientists, and historians question the validity of his as yet unproven dogmatic assertions, and his scientificity. American sociologists, if they read him at all, "apply" him partially, and indirectly, to attempt to influence policy.

Since we're producing more therapy and therapists, more laws and lawyers, more crime and criminals, and more law enforcement and police, Foucault argues that manipulation and deviance have taken over. That's why he predicts the end of our era, even though he doesn't indicate how it will come about, or what will take its place. And that's why he's been called a millenarian—a millenarian who searches for signs of the next age. Chances are that he won't find these signs in his codes of knowledge. But because he has the resources to interpret the conditions of our existence—the prerequisite for any sort of change—he seems to be one of our prophets. Foucault himself is the marginal man he writes about, the new Don Quixote who is lost between two ages and who, just because he takes in everything, forever remains ambivalent.

EDITH KURZWEIL

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THE PERFORMING SELF

BYRON'S LETTERS AND JOURNALS ed. Leslie A. Marchand. Volume I, '*In My Hot Youth*'; Volume II, '*Famous in My Time*'; Volume III, '*Alas! the Love of Women!*'. Harvard University Press.

Like a hero of romance he had a single name. "Byron" is the aesthetic opposite of the grim monosyllable that made Matthew Arnold lament the ugliness of English names, "Wragg." Lean and clear, phonetically spelt, elegant to look at, it has the virtues Byron liked in a name, being short, vocalic, and ancient. He played with spelling it "Burun," and, more often, "Biron," in French. Of course he had a dashing handwriting, and he enjoyed varying his signature. Sometimes he signed a lordly "B"; more idiosyncratically and boyishly, he transliterated his name into Greek letters, or scrawled the first two as a monogram. Although, or because, he hated his mother-in-law, from whom he later inherited the title "Noel," the evidence of orthography is that he enjoyed adding it. He had a passion for paradoxes, and his favorite had to do with the self (his) as single but multiple, changing and constant, false while sincere. Both as a poet and an inveterate "scribbler" of letters and journals, he tried to find and to escape the right name for it.

Byron was one of those people who seem quintessentially human although they are obviously not like most of us at all. He was a star. One is curious about how such people exist, and the trivial, ordinary bits of their actual lives are interesting in proportion to the extent to which they themselves are artifacts or emblems, rather than women or men. Byron's laundry lists and his correspondence with his banker have the poignancy of Napoleon's cold in *War and Peace*. Everything he wrote, especially what was most private and unstudied, is relevant, since what we want to know is how real life goes for someone who seems the embodiment of an idea. Writing variously to express and "to withdraw myself from myself," Byron also consciously anticipated our interest. Thomas Moore, who burned the *Memoirs*, is the villain of the piece starring Byron. Leslie A. Marchand, the editor of a new compendious edition of *Byron's Letters and Journals*, is one of the most helpful members of the Chorus. It is fitting that Professor Marchand is

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preparing the product of careful scholarship (there will be nine volumes) for the general reader. The letters are good reading, lively and civilizing, and it is interesting to remember Byron right now. A number of modern ideas about identity, roles, consciousness, and language are sharply and movingly reflected in his image.

The idea of Byron which stirred young Alfred Tennyson and the Brontës, and people all across Europe who read no English, was both easy to grasp and complex. In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, the poem which brought him instant celebrity, Byron created a prototypical Romantic hero, sated and bored, seeking meaning with near hopelessness, yearning to escape the boundaries of his being. But Harold's clear outlines are illusory. Precisely because of all he is, the poem about him focuses not so much on its hero as on the real things which absorb and are absorbed by him as he travels; the membrane between the character and his background, between fiction and historical reality, is alive. Conspicuous in Harold's background is Lord Byron, with whom he is essentially entangled. The theme of the poet creating his hero in order to create himself eventually takes over the poem:

> 'Tis to create, and in creating live
> A being more intense, that we endow
> With form our fancy, gaining as we give
> The life we image, even as I do now.
> What am I? Nothing: but not so art thou,
> Soul of my thought! with whom I traverse earth,
> Invisible but gazing, as I glow
> Mix'd with thy spirit, blended with thy birth,
> And feeling still with thee in my crush'd feelings' dearth.

Harold's graphic gloom, Byron's rank and youth and beauty, the persuasiveness and the evident self-indulgence of their anguish, their merging identities—all together make up the *event* that was Byron, not quite extraliterary but not quite literary either. The idea of Byron is the idea of dramatic, boldly expressive rhetoric that realizes the personality, and of profoundly ironic self-creation.

Byron moved in and out of himself as he moved in and out of Harold; his own life seemed to him a play of varying reality, and he commented on it as if he were entitled to do so. The early letters reveal an original youth very good at expressing urgent "hot" feelings while also acknowledging how those must look from the outside. Writing

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about his mother, for example, he is angry, proud, and passionate, and yet aware of the unfairness, and even foolishness, a son's complaints about a mother inevitably have. One wonders if Byron's self-consciousness derived from the fact that he turned into "Lord Byron" at ten, an age at which the sense of what is real and what is unreal is acute. Titles, names, words, always seemed to him things, detachable from life, provisional, magical in their effect and empty in themselves. Meanwhile, he grew into a genius at using them. Lady Byron put it acidly: "He is the absolute monarch of words, and uses them, as Bonaparte did lives, for conquest without more regard for their intrinsic value." One could not expect *her* to acknowledge that *he* conferred value on *them.*

Byron was an extraordinary and energetic correspondent. In the nineteenth century, when *Don Juan* was widely considered immoral, the letters were disparaged too; now that most people think his noncomic poems were the least valuable things Byron wrote, the author of *Don Juan* is celebrated for his outspoken, lively letters. The temptation to interpret the shift in attitude as progress is to be resisted. It is true that, if only by example, Byron drives one to extremes, but, read closely, he also warns against them. Byron's are great letters, but not because they debunk the poetry or the legend. They contain neither the essentially witty man behind the saturnine mask nor the facts of life behind the fictions. Candid and stagey, they present with uncommon immediacy an engaging and complex person uncomfortably but indissolubly married to his language. Unlike biographies of any length or tone, they seem the appropriate form for Byron's life. The mosaic-like portrait produced by a collection is telling, like the juxtaposition of letters and journals. Byron's contradictoriness was not merely social or epistolary: "If I am sincere with myself (but I fear one lies more to one's self than to any one else), every page should confute, refute, and utterly abjure its predecessor," he writes in a journal. He ends another entry as if it were a letter to someone: "By the by, I am yawning now—so, good night to thee,—Μπαιρωγ." The letters prove that distinctions between the poet and the correspondent, the private and the public, the natural and the artificial Byron, must be as false as all the other dichotomies (classic vs. romantic, comic vs. serious) loved by those spiritual descendants of his wife who haunt his ghost in the guise of critics and biographers. By sheer force of self-consciousness he defies tidy minds.

Like the best parts of all his poems, Byron's prose moves directly, confidently, accumulating strength. Even such things as a letter

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sparingly complimenting a stranger's verses (he called what he was doing "lettering"), or a note of pear-shaped politeness to Lord Holland, are free of flab, purposeful, with every word working. To praise the letters "as prose" is to praise them for being honest and accurate. The famous jaunty accounts of his adventures and reflections which Byron wrote when he felt sociable and amusing are triumphs of the talk for its own sake which is a celebration of both language and personality. In these accounts he shifts directions, modifies tones, turns upon himself, partly mocking and partly glorying in the fine style that reflects his complexity. Byron's delight in a phrase which conveys a whole attitude, in the syntactical turn which allows him to gloat over it, is delight in himself, intriguing, contagious, and invigorating.

He wrote letters partly in order to find his life interesting. And, as life interfered, he relished the drama of letter writing. An account of Lady Caroline Lamb's pursuit of him is interrupted, he notes, by the delivery of a letter from Lady Caroline Lamb; as he catches Lady Melbourne up on the progress of an amour, the husband he is planning to deceive walks into the room where he sits writing; a mistress looks over his shoulder, another time, as he writes to someone else, but also, since she's watching, to her, about her charms. The immediacy of these little dramas of correspondence is conveyed in a prose in which words are evidently in action, changing the writer's mood and meaning as they occur to him. A rueful, ironic, speculative distance from himself, suddenly intruding, often saves him from self-pity or worse, flipping up the droopy end of a sentence, a thought, a paragraph, a letter. Reality, described by words, therefore changes. One wonders if Lady Byron got it right after all.

Sometimes these meticulously reproduced historical documents read like an epistolary novel. As Byron ridicules his friend James Wedderburn Webster for foolishly adoring his wife, then writes to him, visits him, flirts with the wife, sends Webster a gift of a cheese, almost succeeds in cuckolding him, and then lends him money, the hero remains likeable and the plot entertaining. On a more serious level, the function of letters in Byron's story suggests, as *Clarissa* and *les Liaisons Dangereuses* do, how people change by presenting themselves to others. Byron's letters to Lady Melbourne, notorious for their revealing hints of his incestuous affair with his half-sister Augusta Leigh, are at least as revealing for the way they hint. In the heat of the affair and after it, he wrote about it to his confidante as the most difficult and dangerous of a string of romantic adventures among society ladies, amusing her by distinguishing between her niece Annabella Milbanke,

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a near-stranger she urged him to marry, and his sister, "your A" and "my A." His commitment to write about his love life to Lady Melbourne was a pledge to be a witty rake. Writing to her, he kept himself that way, alienating his own affections. Her advice and his desire to maintain their correspondence saved him from both Caroline and Augusta, he tells her. In a gallant but surely not empty protest, he says that the correspondence itself is his dearest object. The particular "business" is that of Lady Frances Webster:

> I am not sorry for this business—were it only on account of your epistles—which I do think the most amusing--the most *developing*—and *tactiques* in the world—come what may—I can hardly regret the untoward events which led to an intimacy productive to me of much instruction—& not less *intellectual* pleasure—you have preserved me from *two*—one eventually & the other had been immediately fatal—I cannot repay the obligation but I may at least acknowledge it—& as the world goes it is something not to hate you for having done me so much service.

Embroiled with demanding, oppressively physical females, Byron made courtly love by letter to Lady Melbourne, over sixty and retired from the field, so that his temperature might drop. Then, to amuse her and himself, he embroiled himself anew.

The connection between Byron's correspondence with his mother surrogate and the crucial event of his life is startling: he thought of marrying Annabella Milbanke partly because she was Lady Melbourne's niece. Drawing room comedy assumes, as we read, a causal relationship to tragedy. The letters tell, and also are, the whole story; for Byron seems not to have seen Miss Milbanke for about two years before she accepted him, by mail, in early September of 1814. Just a year before that she had surprised him with an odd compulsive letter "explaining" why she had turned down his proposal in 1812. The second courtship thus initiated was carried on entirely by letter, so all the facts are available to our curiosity, complicated as they are by the conventions and limitations of correspondence. (The irony that governed Byron's life, slipping in and out of his own hands, extended to the letter—it will appear in Volume IV—which Annabella read as a proposal but which is perhaps simply a remarkable instance of a brilliant letter-writer's faking himself out.) Byron decided very early that Annabella was a girl who had been "Clarissa Harlow'd" into virtuousness by doting parents; the allusion to Richardson's novel is suggestive. Writing to her, he played Lovelace, the rake, professing

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desire to reform himself, her opposite number, as bad as she was good. In love with Augusta and deeply in debt, eager to save his soul and his estate by marrying, Byron was indeed a cynical suitor. On the other hand, Annabella really attracted him, probably by her presumptuous belief that she saw past the poses worshiped by the world to a central loneliness and seriousness like her own. Writing oddly laborious, sometimes marvelous letters to her in which he summed up and packaged himself, he posed so as to reveal, both to challenge her desire to marry him and to whet it:

> I by no means rank poetry or poets high in the scale of intellect—this may look like Affectation—but it is my real opinion—it is the lava of the imagination whose eruption prevents an earth-quake—they say Poets never or rarely go *mad*—Cowper & Collins are instances to the contrary—(but Cowper was no poet)—it is however to be remarked that they rarely do—but are generally so near it—that I cannot help thinking rhyme is so far useful in anticipating & preventing the disorder.—I prefer the talents of *action*—of war—or the Senate—or even of Science—to all the speculations of these mere dreamers of another existence (I don't mean *religiously* but *fancifully*) and spectators of this.—Apathy—disgust—& perhaps incapacity have rendered me now a mere spectator—but I have occasionally mixed in the active and tumultuous departments of existence—& on these alone my *recollection* rests with any satisfaction—though not the *best* parts of it.

As a wit and an aristocratic adventurer, a man of reason and a man of action, as a revolutionary and even as a man of sensibility, Byron voiced disdain for poetry. In 1814 all these poses were flashing in and out of fashion, and Byron could strike any number of them at once, with relish, sincerity, and irony. It is hard to believe he ever thought so literal-minded a lady as Annabella could understand what was going on; the letters to her are also, surely, to himself and to posterity, intended, as he said of those he wrote to Lady Melbourne, "to burst upon the twentieth century." Byron's letters bare his heart by showing how close language was to it. As he grew older he perfected his flexible, wary style, ready to whirl round or catch itself up at any time, full of emphases and interruptions, modifications and distinctions, now stopping to love a detail and then sprinting on to a summary judgment. Threading through the immense variety of things that interested him, it manages to suggest his desperation and his detachment at once. The style is itself, I suppose, the heart of his mystery.

RACHEL BROWNSTEIN

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THE RULES OF THE GAME

ON HUMAN CONDUCT. By Michael Oakeshott. Oxford University Press. $18.50.

During the sixties it became fashionable to put the word politics in book titles. Redolent of complex and hidden goings-on, the word implied the reader would be offered a guide to the action behind the scenes. One would see things as they really are—with all the attendant intrigues, deal-makings, power-plays, shenanigans, or worse. As a result the notion of politics became so inflated as to include every aspect of human conduct—all the games people play—and thus to mean, in the final analysis, virtually nothing. "Politics" took over sociology, psychology, literature, and even political science, which had been desperately laboring to become "value-free." It is to Michael Oakeshott's credit, then, that in his latest work, *On Human Conduct*, he goes against the prevailing doctrinal winds, attempting to reduce the notion of politics to manageable size. The trouble is he goes too far in the other direction, leaving us with a notion of politics that is puzzling and arbitrary.

Oakeshott, Professor Emeritus of Political Science at the London School of Economics, is widely regarded as the leading conservative philosopher, the one contemporary philosopher whom William Buckley likes to quote with approval. Conservatism, though, is a mansion with many rooms in it, and Oakeshott's has little to do with your common, back-porch American variety. In Oakeshott's work we do not find any concern with moral or spiritual renewal, nor do we find any talk about a so-called organic society based upon a consensus about goals. Oakeshott in fact denies the congruence of politics with broad cultural, moral, or religious aims.

Oakeshott also denies that he has anything programmatic to offer. He is, as he says, a philosopher, not a *philosophe*—and a modest philosopher at that, bent on abating mystery rather than achieving definitive understanding. Yet in the central essay of this dense exercise in elucidation, "On the Civil Condition," Oakeshott is anything but tentative, for he makes a sharp distinction between politics and other kinds of human activity. Politics, according to Oakeshott, is a consider-

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ation of rules, not policies. Why so? Because rules, which Oakeshott calls "a vernacular language of civil intercourse," constitute the cement, as it were, that binds citizens with different interests into a polity. Individual citizens of course have "private" interests, but they also have a "public" obligation to subscribe to rules that all citizens—no matter what their particular interests—regard as authoritative. The citizen's relationship to the polity, Oakeshott never tires of saying, is formal, not substantial; it is "association in respect of a common language and not in respect of having the same beliefs, purposes, interests, etc. . . ." This special "formal" relationship Oakeshott calls civil association to distinguish it from relationships based upon common goals, beliefs, and purposes, which Oakeshott calls "enterprise association."

Needless to say, the theoretical territory Oakeshott inhabits is very different from that of most contemporary political philosophers. We are in need of a guide, especially since Oakeshott likes to use words in strange and strained ways. Moreover, he is not very clear about certain key notions—rules, for example. We can say, though, that by rules he means something more than a nation's body of law or parliamentary procedures; he means the custom and ceremony that make for civil order—that is, what we must consider in "playing" the citizen. And by rules he does not mean the nineteenth-century Liberal notion of "the rule of law." Rule-of-law theorists were preoccupied with the rights of individuals whereas Oakeshott is concerned with what holds a state together. A scholar of Hobbes, Oakeshott is very much aware of the fragility of the civil order. Any polity—composed as it is of numerous enterprise associations—can easily collapse into a "state of nature" if the rules lose their authority. And the rules, after all, are vulnerable. According to Oakeshott, they lack any "higher" justification and they also lack "any notable elegance or economy of design." Like the rules of baseball (Oakeshott's analogy is to cricket), they do not lend themselves to abstract, "rational" considerations about their equity.

If Hobbes is always in the back of Oakeshott's mind, so also, in a negative sense, is Marx, the Marx who believed that the state of the future would not be a polity but a managerial enterprise, one in which rules are not adjudicated but, rather, orders are given. Like Hannah Arendt, Oakeshott is trying to rescue politics from the depredations of Marx. His argument, however, cuts both Right and Left, for implicit in his notion of rules is also an attack on those who want the state to be a kind of moral arbiter. Both conservatives and liberals, Oakeshott implies (he avoids such terms altogether), seem at times all too ready to

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forego the "game" of politics, thinking that it gets in the way of moral or social urgencies. Yet if it becomes a pervasive assumption that civil association is an inefficient method of, in effect, keeping up standards or making the trains run on time, then we shall be on the way to subverting the polity.

It does not matter whether such an "efficient" government turns out to be a benevolent father or a Big Brother; the citizen will no longer be participating as an equal in the polity. He will either be the beneficiary or the victim of directives from the millions of civil servants who man the governmental organization. Some will say that such a government truly serves the people, unhindered as it is by procedural niceties, but others may rightfully complain that it is not clear who is serving whom. Servants or served—the people who compose this state will not be citizens but the personnel of a vast organization. "Utopia," Oakeshott says, "has no lawyers but it bristles with inspectors and overseers."

At a time when many would-be *philosophes* assume that politics means finding the best way "to manage our nation" (the quotation is from Elizabeth Drew), Oakeshott's criticism of managerial notions of politics is telling. Nevertheless, there is something amiss with his argument. To use baseball as an analogue: true, the game would not exist without the "public" rules that all players recognize as authoritative, yet the game could not take place without the "private" interest of each player in, say, hitting a home run or catching a fly ball. Rules are a necessary condition of politics but they are not a sufficient condition. The distinctive character of politics may, as one reviewer put it, consist "in a procedural sensibility that has no exact parallel elsewhere," but the political activity of a citizen is necessarily both private and public—or, to use Oakeshott's terms, partakes of both civil and enterprise association.

Indeed, in summing up his argument in "On the Civil Condition" Oakeshott says as much himself, arguing that every civil "...situation is an encounter between 'private' and 'public'...and no situation is the one to the exclusion of the other." It seems arbitrary, then, of Oakeshott to limit politics exclusively to a concern with "civil desirabilities"—that is, the desirability of this or that rule. Moreover Oakeshott is not convincing when he argues that rules can be disentangled from goals. And at one point he does acknowledge that a "political proposal"—that is, a proposal to amend the rules—"may begin in a want, a wish for a benefit," but he argues that this wish "must lose this character and acquire another (a political character) in

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being understood, advanced and considered as a proposal for the amendment of the *respublica* [or polity]...." Though goals, by means of Oakeshott's mysterious "political" transformation, somehow suffer a sea-change and become rules, the goal is clearly the begetter of the rule.

Oakeshott also stumbles, I think, on the notion of desirability, a word he is continually advancing as *the* criterion for amending rules. Desirable, one wonders, with regard to what? Desirability must at least imply some vague standard of judgment that hints at a larger purpose. Surely, in amending the rules of civil association, one of the considerations that should hover over the debate is a necessarily vague notion of justice or fairness. (Oakeshott himself says that in the past "great disparities of wealth were an impediment...to the enjoyment of civil association.") Civil association, Oakeshott says, is a "fiduciary relationship." If numerous citizens, correctly or not, think these rules unfair and unjust, then they will no longer feel obligated to abide by them and the polity will be in danger of collapse. We can say, then, that the rules of civil association are "supported" by a general sense of the polity's benign purposiveness—that the polity is, in the words of Bernard Crick, "improving, reformist, [and] ameliorative...."

The polity is also "supported" by one goal that all citizens have in common: defense of the realm. It may be misguided to say, as Harold Lasswell does, that thinking seriously about government means clarifying one's views "about the proper *goals* [emphasis his] of the political system," yet if the rules of civil association are to remain in effect the citizens must agree on the goal of defense. Though Oakeshott does say that warfare has often transformed states into enterprise associations, he would add that the goal of defense is not intrinsic to the state in its "ideal character," a phrase he is forever resorting to when he wants to stress that he is theorizing, not dealing in historical realities. For goals pertain to enterprise association, which is, as he says, "categorically discrete" from civil association.

But to argue that they are categorically discrete is to say very little indeed. Oakeshott's distinction between civil and enterprise association is, *tout court*, a logical distinction—no more, no less. It does not allow him to launch attacks on those who pay too much attention to substantive questions, a tactic he often employs, thereby disconcertingly switching from the analytical to the hortatory. How, for example, should we regard the following sentences, found in the midst of his theoretical disquisition? "Thus, engagement in politics entails a disciplined imagination. It is to put by for another occasion the cloudy

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enchantments of *Schlaraffenland*, the earth flowing with milk and honey and the sea transmuted into ginger beer...." This outburst of sententiousness and sarcasm has nothing to do with the argument at hand, but Oakeshott can't resist using his logical niceties as a stick to beat utopian dreamers, whoever they may be.

Once again invoking his distinction, Oakeshott says that there is "no place" in civil association for distributive justice. We can agree that distributive justice, because it implies goals, is categorically discrete from civil association, but the more interesting and important question is: are certain interests, distributive justice for one, by their very nature incapable of being accommodated by the rules of civil association? That is, would an attempt to realize such goals necessarily lead to the withering away of politics and the triumph of managerial government? It is this question, or something very much like it, that Oakeshott does not take up, preferring to belabor the distinction between civil and enterprise association.

However we finally construe Oakeshott's distinction, it should be noted that Oakeshott is a theorist with a penchant for sorting things out into extremely broad categories. In an earlier book, *Rationalism in Politics*, Oakeshott distinguished the "rationalist" in politics from what I suppose we should call the "traditionalist." Oakeshott's rationalist, though, was a straw man—a bogey responsible for all the evils of the twentieth century, both a Marxist "engineer" and a fascist worshipper of the nation-state. Oakeshott's distinction explained so much that it precluded the possibility of making a discriminating analysis of the varieties of modern political belief.

Oakeshott's essay would have been more persuasive, I think, if instead of rationalist he had used the word enthusiast as a general category of opprobium. For one thing, the word is appropriate to Oakeshott himself, since he is very much a man out of the eighteenth century, when the word was in its negative heyday. Enthusiasts of course suffered from enthusiasm—a kind of mental excess that was disturbing in its mixture of complacency and zeal. Among the several definitions of enthusiasm that we find in Johnson's *Dictionary*, two are especially useful as guides not only to "Rationalism in Politics" but to Oakeshott's work in general: "confidence of opinion" and "exaltation of ideas." Oakeshott's argument is less with rationalism as such than with the rationalist's—more properly the enthusiast's—"confidence of opinion" that his ideas are self-evidently true and therefore are only questioned by those who have sinister reasons for doing so. Oakeshott would agree, moreover, with Johnson's remark that "most schemes of

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political improvement are very laughable things," but not because he is against improvement. Rather, Oakeshott is skeptical of the schemer's "exaltation of ideas," his certainty that his ideas are "right" for the polity and should be implemented forthwith. "Politics," Oakeshott says, "is a deliberative and a persuasive or argumentative, not a demonstrative, undertaking." It has nothing to do with discovering or demonstrating truths.

A parliamentarian and an admirer of those great eighteenth-century politicians, Burke, Fox, and Pitt, Oakeshott is an Old Whig whereas Samuel Johnson was disposed to take the side of the Tories, believing as he did in the monarchy and in a "natural" hierarchy. Though Oakeshott, then, is not a Johnsonian Tory, he is one with Johnson and Johnson's Whiggish friends, Burke and Gibbon, in emphasizing the role habit plays in the affairs of man. Oakeshott, like his eighteenth-century forebears, knows that rules are regarded as authoritative not because they are the schemes of this or that enthusiast but because they are the product of "local intelligences" and have been amended slowly over the years. As a result they have come to possess the authority of something long in use.

If Oakeshott's cautionary tale is full of astringent wisdom, it is a tale that in the end leaves out too much, one that is made to order for England, perhaps, but one that ignores a world in which new beginnings must inevitably occur after legitimacy—whether monarchical or tribal—collapses, a world in which Russian dissidents have as their *goal* the creation of such a vernacular of civil intercourse. Oakeshott does not dismiss all such "rationalist" enterprises; he ignores them, arguing that he is not in the business of giving advice. An "intellectual adventure," his book deals with politics only in its "ideal character." But there is something disingenuous about Oakeshott's taking refuge behind the door of theory, for why then does he continually take shots at those poor, deluded souls stumbling about in the political marketplace who are forever confusing questions of politics with questions of policy? Moreover, Oakeshott complacently assumes that once he has banished questions of policy from politics he has thereby sufficiently dealt with them. In so doing Oakeshott seems to be saying that in politics someone who possesses a disciplined imagination is someone who scarcely thinks about policy at all.

STEPHEN MILLER

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WHITE WRITERS' BURDEN

HEAT AND DUST. By Ruth Prawer Jhabvala. Harper and Row. $7.95.

SELECTED STORIES. By Nadine Gordimer. The Viking Press. $10.00.

These are good books, both of them, by two talented and prolific writers who have spent much—or all—of their lives in what used to be known as the Empire. Their now extensive œuvres—eight novels, three volumes of stories in the case of Jhabvala; six novels, five collections of stories by Gordimer—have been written in response to a fate far more peculiar than that which Henry James assigned to being an American. While India and South Africa are vastly different countries with very different experiences of white imperialism, they both exert similar (and extreme) pressures upon writers who share an essentially liberal and English-trained sensibility. The private emotions are constantly being overwhelmed by the public, by the historic. The revolting poverty of India has a way of seeping beneath the doors and around the windows of the best-appointed living rooms. In Africa no white writer can possibly shield her fiction from the shadows cast by Dr. Vorster, Ian Smith, Idi Amin, and what they represent. There is no escape from the topical. Even a very "British" story by Gordimer of suburban adultery in Pretoria ends with an unlatched door banging in the wind and the woman sleepily imagining that "black men with knives in their hands" are about to enter her house and kill her.

They share another unfair burden. Even after fifty years, an "enlightened" white experience of such countries can scarcely be rendered in fiction without evoking for the reader, if not for the writer, the presence of E.M. Forster. His specter is obviously more of a problem for Jhabvala than for Gordimer, but Gordimer's fiction too is preoccupied with the liberal's unremitting effort to "connect", with the frustrations of the Sensitive, with the callous behavior of the Insensitive, with the embarrassed gatherings—as painful as the famous "bridge party" in *A Passage to India*—where the white and black (or "coloured") meet.

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Jhabvala's strategy in *Heat and Dust*—as it was in the immediately preceding *Travelers*—is to confront the Fosterian ghost boldly and, if not to exorcise it, to weaken its influence by public exposure. One of the two stories which constitute the novel—that of the young English woman Olivia who flees her handsome, stiff, and upright husband to seek refuge with a disreputable Nawab—is set in 1923, the exact period of *A Passage to India*. The Medical Superintendant, Dr. Saunders, who discovers that Olivia's miscarriage is really an abortion, is practically a twin of Major Callendar, the stupid and sadistic doctor in the earlier novel. And the Nawab himself, with his entourage, definitely echoes Forster's subtle portrayal of the Maharajah in *The Hill of Devi*. The other story, counterpointed with the first, does not compel the reader into Fosterian comparisons, though they are there to be made—especially in Jhabvala's handling of the relationship between the impulsive, sexually free narrator and her Indian landlord, a minor government official—conventional, reticent, and easily shamed—who is trapped in an arranged and miserable marriage.

The counterpointing itself is one of the major pleasures of this swift novel. The parallels between the history of Olivia and that of her husband's granddaughter, the unnamed narrator, are teasingly inexact, suggesting the patterns of recurrence, metamorphosis, and perhaps reincarnation to be discerned in India (and in England) over a fifty-year span. Olivia's baby (probably fathered by the Nawab) is aborted; the modern girl, after the ministrations of a Hindu wise woman named Maji, decides to keep hers, to bear it in an ashram high above the Himalayan hill station where Olivia lived out the rest of her life in a house provided by the Nawab. Jhabvala's narrative skill, her meaningful brevity, her power of selecting each episode as if it were a special gift—these qualities enable the reader to move back and forth between the two stories with no sense of strain—and with repeated surprise and delight. Seduced, one glides happily over certain improbabilities and defers the recognition that the author is temperamentally far more at home with Olivia and her contemporaries than with the late hippie world of guru-seekers and defiantly unwed mothers. And only in retrospect does one feel slightly cheated by the fact that Jhabvala, like the girl herself, has been unable to imagine the content or quality of Olivia's long years on the mountainside.

Nadine Gordimer has written several impressive novels (among them the recent and insufficiently celebrated *Guest of Honour*), but she is chiefly known to American readers for her stories in *The New Yorker*. Her present selection includes work written over a thirty-year

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period. Although, as she states in her introduction, the chronological order of her stories turns out to be an historical one, reflecting the change in social attitudes in Africa and her apprehension of them, I can detect little real change or development in her art as a writer. Unlike Jhabvala's fiction, which has moved from deft social comedy into something at once bolder and deeper, Gordimer's early stories are as vivid in characterization, as evocative of milieu and landscape, as her most recent. Their range is considerable, incorporating the professional British middle classes, Afrikaaner farmers and townspeople, Indians, Coloreds, and Black militants. They depict breathless girls teetering toward political or sexual awareness, strident matrons, lonely old men, and dumbly suffering servants. Geographically, they venture beyond the familiar South African terrain into the Rhodesias and the Congo, into a world of road-builders, crocodile hunters, and naked tribesmen. Gordimer is an intelligent, sharply observant creator of what might be called classical short stories, each carefully wrought and finely finished, each containing its epiphanal moment. As a writer she is less free than Jhabvala, less willing to cut away connective tissues, more trammelled by the superego of conscientious explanation. Still, the completeness with which the potential of each of her pieces has been realized affords a satisfaction that compensates for the lack of a flashily exciting surface.

At their best (and the number of successes in this selection is high), Gordimer's stories prickle the memory, prolonging the pain of missed connections and failed enterprises in a land that is corroded by terror. I particularly recommend "Six Feet of the Country" from her second collection, the story of a rather flighty couple who suddenly find themselves with a dead African on their hands, and "The Life of the Imagination" from her latest—the tale, referred to earlier, of the adulterous wife and the banging door.

ROBERT TOWERS

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TWO POUNDS

CHARLES OLSON & EZRA POUND: AN ENCOUNTER AT ST. ELIZABETHS. By Charles Olson. Edited by Catherine Seelye. Grossman/Viking. $11.95.

Charles Olson—who passed away in 1970, two years before Ezra Pound—has left us an illuminating, Open Field-fashioned journal consisting mostly of notes and fragments recorded during the first three years of Pound's incarceration at St. Elizabeths, Washington's federal institution for the insane. Pound, saved from a treason trial on the grounds of insanity, was to spend some thirteen years, "one quarter of his writing life," as a prisoner at St. Elizabeths, sane enough to suffer the pangs of internment but not sane enough to be released. When he was finally released in the spring of 1958, it was because the District Court overruled itself. Pound was found "incurably insane" and the indictment against him was quashed.

Olson's initial encounter with the elder statesman of modern verse on January 4, 1946, was hardly propitious. At first glance the two poets appeared to have little in common. "The one," editor Catherine Seelye points out, "was bitter and old, nearing the sad end of a great career; the other was searching for some new means to an uncertain end." Olson, only thirty-five, had barely broken literary ground; his œuvre in 1946 consisted of four published poems and two essays, while Pound's main literary concern, at sixty, was how best to complete *The Cantos*, how to write a paradise while incarcerated in purgatory. *Maximus*, *Moby Dick*, and Black Mountain lay before Olson, Pound's major work lay behind.

Such details as age and experience, however, had never seemed to mean much to Pound. In 1909, armed with an introduction from Olivia Shakespear he presented himself to Yeats, twenty years his senior. Within a matter of months Pound was editing "old Billyum's" work, instructing him in ways of being more modern, helping him find his way out of the semi-darkness of the Celtic Twilight. Olson, on the other hand, was much more aware than Pound had ever been of such social amenities as seniority and past performance. He was also extremely conscious of the dichotomy which existed between Pound as

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poet and Pound as politician. He admired Pound's literary acumen, his ability to write and shape verse; but he detested the cruel, shrill rhetoric to which Pound was so prone. "He is a fascist," Olson later wrote in his journal, "the worst kind, the intellectual fascist, this filthy apologist and mouther of slogans which serve men of power. It was a sham upon all writers when this man of words, this succubus, sold his voice to the enemies of the people." That, of course, was one side of the coin; the other side was quite different: "He remains (Olson wrote), on the creative side of him, whole, and as charming and open and warm a human being as I know. Despite all the corruption of his body politic...I shall still hold out my hand."

This seeming contradiction between the two Pounds—Pound as Jekyll and Pound as Hyde—is ultimately what binds this book together; it provides what otherwise might seem a disconnected narrative with a common theme. But if it helps make these disparate notes cohere, it also serves as a divisive agent, splitting the author in twain. Olson is unable, ultimately, to come to terms with these dual aspects of Pound's personality. Following one of his visits to St. Elizabeths, the then fledgling poet had this to say: "For the first time, the full shock of what a fascist s.o.b. Pound is caught up with me." And then: "Hate blinds. It makes this man of exquisite senses a false instrument. It makes a lie of perception. It empties Pound.... I wonder...how long more I can hold out my hand to him as a poet and a man." But a breath later, in the same paragraph, he reconsiders: "I shall do what I can, as long as I can, for this fool of hate because once he was also a fool of love."

If Olson's uncertainty and indecisiveness in regard to Pound begin to cloy, they nevertheless work well together as a kind of contrapuntal device against which to measure the constancy and sameness of the institution itself. Dickens and Poe in tandem could not have designed a more forbidding, lackluster setting than St. Elizabeths. With its massive red brick Victorian buildings, winding footpaths the color of clay, psychopaths and catatonics, it was a study in ugliness. During his first year in captivity, Pound occupied a cramped cubicle in Howard Hall, the hospital's maximum security ward, home of the criminally insane. Pound dubbed it the "Hell-Hole," and it made the Detention Training Center outside Pisa, where he had endured a previous semester's stay, look like a country club.

Howard Hall, described by Olson in graphic detail, was a grim 1880s structure with locked doors and gratings at the windows. It was surrounded by a massive cement wall. Outside the building, but within

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the confines of the wall, was a small exercise yard. Like the other inmates, Pound was permitted a brief daily exercise period in the yard. At all other times he was locked into his cell. The thick black steel door, which separated him (perhaps mercifully) from the madmen and lunatics in slippers and straitjackets, was pierced by nine peepholes cut into it in three horizontal rows. Medics so inclined, could observe the poet inside his cubicle by peering in at him. Moreover, the corridors steamed with heat and reeked of bile and sweat. Pound's earliest visitors—Theodore Spencer, Caresse Crosby, and H. L. Mencken, among others—came away appalled and shocked by what they had just seen. They could not understand how anyone could maintain even the semblance of sanity under conditions such as these. Perhaps they assumed too much. Pound purportedly suffered from claustrophobia and loneliness and the feeling that he was gradually going insane. On one occasion his "clear conscience" provided him (Noel Stock has written in his 1970 Pound biography) "with a moment of happiness, despite his surroundings." "I remember," the poet later told a friend, "a moment of quite irrational happiness in the hell-hole."

A sense of Pound's struggle to keep his head above water pervades the whole of Olson's chronicle. He survived by keeping his mind alive. The running monologue was a useful aid. As in days of old his voice piped and droned; his conversation ran the gamut. He talked about a younger Yeats, warning him to keep his own nose clean of politics; about the American Indian on the ward, who ran around talking about killing people; about the Jews, usury, C. H. Douglas, and social credit. He talked about Gaudier-Brzeska, Katyn, *Newsweek*, Congressman George Holden Tinkham, the indictment for treason, Westbrook Pegler, Silvio Gesell, stamp scrip, Bennet Cerf, and Ford Madox Ford. He recommended books for reading (Ronald Duncan's *Journal of a Husbandman* and the short stories of Mary Butts) and discussed the ramifications of the war ("Radar won the war, production was second, and military strategy third"). One day Olson brought him a copy of *The Fountainhead* by Ayn Rand. Someone else brought him a Georgian primer; he wanted to learn the language, he claimed, so that he could correspond with Stalin. And Harry S. Truman: Who was he, he wanted to know. Was he the one behind his own current troubles? "Does his name happen to be Warren Gamaliel?" he asked, the question a thrust at The Harding Administration. "You will have to take his name as it sounds," replied Olson.

Then, too, the prisoner complained bitterly about the never-ending psychiatric examinations, the mind probes performed on him

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by one staff psychiatrist after another: "If they want to examine me why don't they give me some scientist, I wouldn't mind.... But this intolerable questioning. Good god, what the hell difference does it make what I was reading in 1902!" The only subject Pound consistently shied away from in these talks with Olson was the question of his Italian radio broadcasts during the war. When forced to confront the issue his response was always the same. His aim had not been to defend Mussolini or Italian Fascism but to save the American Constitution and keep America out of the war. Confucius, he told Olson, was the basis of his defense; in Kung could be found the key.

Glib explanations of this sort helped alienate him further from friends and acquaintances. "In everyone's relations with Mr. Pound there come...coolnesses," E.E. Cummings was to write. The chill set in between Pound and Olson toward the middle of 1948. Pound's ethnological antagonisms proved too much for Olson to bear. "I have as much or more of a quarrel with the Swedes and the Irish as with the Yids," Pound had said. This was followed by an even more offensive vociferation: "I was a Zionist in Italy, but now I'm for pogroms, after what I've experienced in here." Olson's visits to St. Elizabeths ceased. The two poets did not meet again until 1965, when their paths crossed at the eighth annual Festival of Two Worlds at Spoleto. But by then the aged craftsman had taken his mysterious oath of silence and was as mute as the Sphinx.

This book, then, is the best record we shall probably ever have of the relationship which existed between these two men. It is well served by Mrs. Seelye's astute editing and the addition of a detailed set of footnotes. A number of Olson's poems, written about Pound or with Pound in mind, have also been included and are central to the text. My only regret is that too little has been said in the volume about Pound's role as a literary model for Olson and through Olson for poets like Allen Ginsberg, Robert Creeley, and Gregory Corso. A comparison, even a short one, of Pound's revolutionary ideogrammatic method vis-à-vis Olson's projectivist or Open Field verse technique would have been most welcome here, although without it the book still manages to stand very erect on its own two feet.

C. DAVID HEYMANN

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WRITERS' CHOICE

RICHARD SENNETT: I've been recently rereading John Neff's *War and Human Progress* which Norton now publishes. It is a classic historical study which has been neglected for some twenty years. In part, its neglect is due to Neff's Catholic humanism. He was a friend of Jacques Maritain and tried to combine his religious impulses with the most exact and detailed scrutiny of the economics of early capitalism. Neff's previous books dealt, for instance, with the English coal trade in the seventeenth century and what this coal trade showed about an increasing cultural disposition to quantify human labor and thus to abandon the metaphysical ideas of labor which governed medieval Christian theology.

War and Human Progress deals with the relationship between scientific innovation, capitalism, and fluctuations in the severity of warfare over the last three centuries. It is a superb piece of historical writing. The reader is presented with a mass of details consistently illuminating the larger subject. Neff believes the ideology of modern capitalism, rather than the economic infra-structure or the military exploitation of science per se, controls the severity of war. But I'm giving a poor synopsis of a complicated book—a book which deserves a large audience.

DAVID IGNATOW: No one could deny the nobility of Wendell Berry's dream of the sanctity of the soil. I will not comment on his techniques in *Clearing*, Harcourt Brace, Jovanovich they are all that we have read before by writers of equal talent in the free forms of William Carlos Williams. Occasionally he works skillfully at the traditional rhymed and metered verse, but Berry should be singled out for his vision. He is a poet who is a farmer, who is a professor of English, who cannot write an evil word about the work of living but must make his farm the podium from which to write eloquently of our relationship to the earth. He suffers his tasks in the field and in the barn gladly. He scorns the real estate developer who prostitutes the earth for the sake of the dollar, and he celebrates the small, ordinary farmer who has no pretension to wealth but asks only that the earth return to him in kind the love and care he brings to it. Berry's own devotion to the earth is quite the same, if not more so, in that one gets the feel in his poems of a lover and his beloved in mystical union. He is fervently dedicated to reform of the treatment of the earth as it has been treated by greed and shortsightedness, and his poetry often glows with the spirit of his pursuit.

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STEPHEN MILLER: If poetry often suffers at the hands of translators, poets themselves sometimes suffer when they are "translated" to a foreign culture; the old audience dwindles away and a new audience proves difficult to acquire. Czeslaw Milosz, the Polish poet, may be a case in point. I don't know how Milosz, who is also an excellent essayist, autobiographer, and literary critic, fares in his native Poland, but in the United States, where he has lived for the past twenty-five years, he does not seem to be much read. Yet his *Selected Poems* (Seabury Press, 1973) mark him as one of the best poets now appearing in English. I say "appearing" advisedly, for Milosz writes most of his poems in Polish. But he also does most of the translating himself, so he is really a strange breed of cat: a Polish-English poet. However we label him, Milosz is very much a poet in the modernist mainstream, his expansive and ruminative verse recalls Whitman and Eliot. Though the form Milosz's poems often take seems American, the mind at work in the poems seems thoroughly European: preoccupied with the devastations and dislocations of history, suspicious of paeans to nature or hymns to the imagination. Tinged with surrealism, Milosz's best poems are wildly imaginative yet also incisive, astringent, moving; they rival the best of Yeats, Montale, and Mandelstam.

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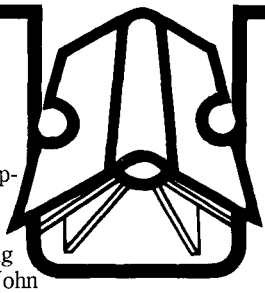

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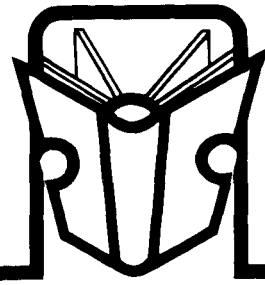

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